

The Pavey Family

Eighteen-year-old Trevor Pavey has been on a tremendously challenging pediatric cancer journey since being diagnosed with medulloblastoma in 2016. After his initial brain tumor was found, he faced surgery, chemotherapy and radiation, followed later by the discovery of a second brain tumor, more painful treatments, a diagnosis of chemo-induced leukemia and two risky stem cell replacements.

And yet – despite the difficulties that have altered his daily life and his future – Trevor is a cheerful, funny and hopeful young man who spreads positivity to those around him.

Trevor and his mom, Michelle Pavey, say much of his often-joyful demeanor can be attributed to his experience with Camp One Step – particularly the Digital Camps that was a lifeline during the pandemic, and again as he recovered from the stem cell replacements and complications that have resulted.

“A pediatric cancer diagnosis can suck the life out of you,” Michelle says. “But for our family, Camp One Step has brought back some of the light that was missing.”

Trevor has attended Brain Tumor Family Camp, Summer Camp, Sibling Camp and Dude Ranch Camp in Wisconsin, as well as Utah Ski Camp in Park City. These experiences have enabled him to make new friends and be a kid again. The impact is evident in his smile as he recalls many of the adventures. The in-person camps also have given the Pavey’s the opportunity to bond as a family and find support from others who “get it.” But Trevor says participating in Camp One Step virtually through their Digital Camps has made the biggest difference – because it has been the one reliable bright spot when he was stuck in the hospital at his lowest.

In the wake of his stem cell replacements, Trevor had to spend up to 11 weeks at a time in a tiny hospital room, seeing only his immediate family and members of his medical team. The hospitalizations have been followed by confinement at home, with visitors limited due to the fear of him contracting an illness while in a weakened state.

Michelle says Trevor, normally a gregarious kid who loves to sing and dance, has struggled during these times. She says it was hard to stay positive and keep his spirits up during those long weeks. But Digital Camps provided the opportunity to interact with people outside of the hospital environment, and it was something to plan for and look forward to, which matters a lot when there aren’t many bright spots in a day.

The benefits of Digital Camps extend to parents as well. Family programs include virtual breakout groups that give the adults a chance to share their stories, ask questions and offer support to each other. The in-person camps also provide plenty of opportunities for parents to connect.

Michelle says this is often where they find their people – not in the Facebook groups, which can be filled with bad news, and not in their social circles, where friends try their best but don't always know what to say or do, and often end up retreating. She adds that seeing kids and families who are doing well and thriving can provide a lift and needed inspiration for others. Trevor agrees that the best thing about doing camp through Digital Camps is the opportunity to hang out in the chat rooms and take part in informal virtual activities with kids his own age who are going through similar experiences. He points to the online dance parties and a New Year's Eve party as highlights.

"Especially during COVID, when there was no social interaction, actually being face to face talking with friends was pretty big," Trevor says, adding that many of the kids he sees in the digital programs are campers he's met in the past.

Michelle stresses that for teens, this opportunity for bonding and friendship is crucial, because social opportunities are lacking for older kids who are facing serious illness. "Teens are not always served well in a hospital setting," she says. "They need a different level of intelligent discourse, and you can't leave that up to a staff that's already overworked. Whether in person or virtual, Camp One Step fills that role, by giving teens a real-time connection to other kids their age."

The Pavey family has participated in on-demand programming that lives on the website and can be done independently at any time, as well as the scheduled single- or multi-session "live" programs.

Trevor says it's exciting to receive the care packages that come before each scheduled session – boxes full of supplies for the art projects, games and other activities. One highlight, he recalls, was receiving an ice cream maker and gift card to purchase supplies for the ice cream-making demo. Other virtual group projects have involved making donuts, waffles, candles, flags and tie dye shirts.

Pavey family members are incredibly thankful for their strong faith and church community. They say the people they have met through Camp One Step also have given them strength and support when they've needed it most. "When your child has cancer, all you think about is getting him through each day. It's something no one can truly understand unless they're living it too," says Michelle, who has taken four leaves of absence from her job as a dental hygienist and has been by Trevor's side every step of the way.

Today, Trevor's brain tumors are under surveillance, and he continues to recover from his second stem cell transplant in October 2023, which was done to treat his leukemia. The transplant left him with deficits and presented him with ongoing battles to fight over the past several months.

But Trevor's positive outlook is ever present, as he looks forward to his future opportunities. He graduated from high school in May 2024, has already taken some online college classes and

wants to join his brother Jonah as a Camp One Step counselor. His brother Owen also plans to become a counselor.

Michelle calls Trevor's illness "terrible but treatable," and says the situation is "nowhere as good as it should be, but it could be worse."

How has the family managed to maintain such hope? Michelle says that she, her husband and her sons believe in getting support from others who have been there, and then offering support to those who are just starting the journey.

"There will always be someone in front of you and someone behind you," she says. "That's the magic of the safe space and support that Camp One Step provides."