



"I am more alive now than I was before."

ARC retreat participant

Abbey Retreat Centre offered its first in-person retreat for people living with cancer in 2018. These four day retreats for people living with a cancer diagnosis and their primary support person have been at the heart of ARC's work during these three years. We have gained a province-wide reputation for these unique retreats that are ultimately about transformation and healing, which is different than 'cure'. Participants, who may be at any stage of the cancer experience, participate in discussion groups, restorative yoga and breathing exercises, nutritional learning, expressive arts, connection with nature and rest. Having worked closely with Integrative Cancer Care Centres in Ontario, we have developed an evidence-based retreat program that gently tends the whole person, body, mind, heart and spirit. We have a fairly large waiting list of people who are interested in participating in a retreat.

We very much rely on financial support from the community as ARC has committed to offering these retreats at no-cost to the participants. We understand the financial burden that can often accompany a cancer diagnosis and we strive to provide a place of healing that does not add to that burden.

Our purpose and our location are also tied together in a powerful way. Abbey Retreat Centre is one of a few organizations situated on the grounds of Abbey Gardens Community Trust, an amazing restoration project where an old gravel pit is slowly being transformed into a green space to provide economic and recreational opportunities for the community. There's a healing and restorative energy at the heart of this place – in the land, among the trees, and within the beautiful ponds and streams just outside of ARC's doors. As the community comes together to help the earth heal and renew, ARC also creates a community where people help each other heal and renew themselves, particularly in the midst of living with all that a cancer diagnosis brings. There's a powerful sense of being held here – by the land, by the founders and board, by the staff and facilitators, by the volunteers and all of the generous donors that support this work and hold each retreat participant in their hearts. It's a powerful and healing place to spend time.

Because cancer already isolates people and Covid19 has added additional levels of isolation, we have moved our in-person retreats and programs to an online format. Our Yoga Therapist offers a variety of online restorative drop-in yoga classes for people living with cancer. Our Expressive Arts Practitioner offers a 4-6 week online expressive arts series that invites people, through simple art making exercises, to explore the challenges of living with a cancer diagnosis. We also offer a peer-led support group, where people gather weekly to share, listen, provide hope and encouragement and build community with others who are facing the trials and turmoil that accompany a cancer diagnosis. Feb. 19-20 marks our second online retreat where 20 participants locally and across Ontario will gather together over Zoom for a day and a half of community building, yoga, expressive arts, healing circles and friendship.

Currently, we are in the process of exploring how to expand our cancer support programming beyond retreats to other initiatives that will serve our local community. We are also asking whether there are other wellness programming 'gaps' within Haliburton County that ARC's unique and transformational approach is well equipped to address.