



Organization History

River Discovery is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit and was founded in October 2006 by Joe and Fran Tonsmeire, longtime whitewater rafting outfitters and ranchers from Lemhi, Idaho. They envisioned river-based programming where young participants addressed the emotional and physical challenges cancer survivors face after treatment. Both Tonsmeires had experienced those challenges firsthand, Fran is a breast cancer survivor and Joe lost his battle to cancer in March 2007.

The Steele-Reese Foundation awarded River Discovery a \$50,000 start-up grant in 2007. The first adventure programs were offered that summer; both were ranch-based where clients spent a week rafting, hiking, horseback riding, swimming and fishing. In 2008, the board decided to conduct all programs on multi-day river trips; that evolved to multi-day wilderness river trips in 2009.

Six adventure programs have been offered since 2007, two annually: one for children and one for adults. All three adult programs have focused on cancer survivors. River Discovery partnered with Hemophilia Foundation of Idaho (HFI) for the first two youth programs and focused on the hemophilia population. In the fall of 2008, the board and executive director of River Discovery reviewed its vision, mission and objectives and made the decision to focus efforts exclusively on the cancer survivor population. At the same time, HFI decided to plan their camp closer to Boise in 2009. Those decisions made sense for both organizations. As a result the 2009 youth program targeted teenaged cancer survivors.

2009 was the first year River Discovery offered a youth program where minors attended without an accompanying adult. Taking teens on a wilderness river gave them a chance to grow and learn on their own - an empowering experience.

Mission Statement: River adventures for cancer survivors that promote healing and strengthen the mind, body and spirit

River Discovery is comprised of a part-time executive director, an eight member board, and a community of dedicated volunteers. In November 2009, the board participated in a two-day strategic planning retreat that focused efforts, identified strengths and weaknesses, and outlined goals and objectives. A two year strategic plan has been adopted and a work plan developed to achieve goals.

In addition to the adventure programs, River Discovery has teamed with Reham Jacobsen since January 2007 to offer individual mosaic kits for children to create while undergoing cancer treatments at Mountain States Tumor Institute (MSTI) in Boise. When Joe Tonsmeire was in treatment at MSTI his family spent a lot of time there and found Reham's shop, Mosaic Essential nearby. An afternoon escape from the hospital has evolved into a partnership: a generous River Discovery donor provides the funding; Reham buys materials and delivers the projects. The kits are available at MSTI for all children in treatment where they can work on their projects either in a group setting or alone in their rooms. After the young patients finish their mosaics, Reham completes the grouting and delivers the final product to them.