



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.

Two adventure programs per year have been offered since 2007: one for children and one for adults. All three adult programs have focused on cancer survivors. River Discovery partnered with the Hemophilia Foundation of Idaho 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. Starting in 2009 the youth program focused on teen cancer survivors. 2009 was also the first year the youth program was designed for minors to attend without an accompanying parent. 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 was adopted and a work plan developed to achieve goals.

In addition to the adventure programs, River Discovery has teamed with Reham Aarti since January 2007 to offer individual mosaic kits for young patients to create while at St. Luke's Children's Hospital in Boise. When Joe Tonsmeire was in cancer treatment at St. Luke's, 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 assembles the materials and grouts the finished projects. The kits are available at the hospital for all children in treatment to create either in a group setting or individually in their rooms.