



ONE TREE PROJECT

An Oregon 501(c)(3) LLC

Shaping the Future

A therapeutic bonsai initiative of Bonsai Mirai, One Tree Project, and the Childhood Cancer Program at Doernbecher Children's Hospital in Portland, Oregon.

Shaping the Future is an innovative year-long therapeutic program designed for up to eight teenagers undergoing cancer treatment. Developed in partnership with the Childhood Cancer Program at Doernbecher Children's Hospital, the initiative brings participants into the world of bonsai under the guidance of renowned bonsai artist Ryan Neil and his team at Bonsai Mirai near Portland, Oregon. Through the ancient Japanese art of bonsai, participants will explore resilience, transformation, patience, and beauty while creating their own living work of art.

Over the course of the program, each participant will cultivate and shape a bonsai tree, learning the care, attention, and perseverance required to transform raw material into a refined living form. As the tree develops over time, the artistic process becomes a meaningful metaphor for the personal journeys these young patients are navigating as they confront the challenges of cancer with courage and determination.

Ryan Neil is the founder of Bonsai Mirai, a globally recognized bonsai studio and educational platform based near Portland. After completing a six-year apprenticeship under master bonsai artist Masahiko Kimura in Saitama, Japan, Neil has become one of the leading figures advancing bonsai in the Western world. Through Bonsai Mirai, he has helped elevate bonsai into a respected living art form and educational discipline for a global audience.

This initiative is made possible in collaboration with One Tree Project, the nonprofit organization founded to create, share, and preserve the natural world through the art form of bonsai. One Tree Project's mission is to foster meaningful relationships between people and trees in ways that inspire conservation, education, and healing, with a particular emphasis on empowering youth through nature-based engagement. Its programs support youth education, tree conservation, and research, making it a natural philanthropic partner for this work.

The program is grounded in the principles of horticultural therapy, an evidence-based approach that uses plant-centered activities to support emotional, cognitive, and physical well-being. Gardening and plant care have been shown to reduce stress and anxiety, promote mindfulness, encourage gentle activity, and create opportunities for self-expression. For children undergoing cancer treatment, who often face prolonged hospitalization, social isolation, and a loss of control over their daily lives, horticultural therapy can offer calm, connection, and the empowering experience of nurturing a living thing.

The symbolism of bonsai resonates deeply with the experiences of young people facing cancer. Bonsai artists shape trees through pruning, wiring, and cultivation over time, guiding growth through challenge and constraint to reveal strength, character, and beauty. In much the same way, children and adolescents undergoing cancer treatment endure profound physical and emotional trials that shape their lives. Though changed by that journey, many emerge with extraordinary resilience, perspective, and strength.

Childhood cancer remains a major health challenge. In the United States, more than 15,000 children and adolescents are diagnosed each year. While advances in treatment have significantly improved survival rates, many patients still endure long and difficult courses of therapy, and many survivors face lasting medical, cognitive, and psychosocial effects. For this reason, programs that support emotional resilience, creative expression, and healing are not ancillary to care, but an important complement to it.

By bringing together the artistry of bonsai, the therapeutic value of horticultural engagement, and the lived experiences of young people confronting cancer, **Shaping the Future** seeks to create a meaningful space for reflection, creativity, and personal growth. Each participant will leave the program not only with a bonsai tree shaped by their own hands, but also with a lasting symbol of resilience, transformation, and hope.

With Bonsai Mirai providing artistic leadership and educational excellence, and One Tree Project serving as the nonprofit partner to advance access, research, and community support, **Shaping the Future** offers a compelling model for how art, nature, and compassionate care can come together to serve young people and their families.

To date, the program has secured **\$2,368 in awarded grant support** and **\$5,000 in matching funds**, demonstrating early confidence in the initiative. We are currently seeking an additional **\$4,151** to fully fund the pilot year.

References

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Childhood Cancer in the United States

- **1 in 260 U.S. residents** will develop cancer before the age of 20.
- Childhood cancer remains the **leading cause of death from disease among children.**
- Major advances in research have improved outcomes dramatically:
 - For example, survival for **acute lymphoblastic leukemia (ALL)**—the most common childhood cancer—has improved from **less than 5% in the 1960s to over 90% today**, largely due to clinical trials and research advances.
- However, **many childhood cancers still have survival rates as low as ~10%**, underscoring the urgent need for continued research and innovation.

Pediatric Cancer Care at Doernbecher

- **~150 new pediatric cancer patients** begin treatment at Doernbecher Children's Hospital each year.
- **In 2025:**
 - **1,251 pediatric cancer patients** were treated in the Doernbecher cancer clinic.
 - **15,302 patient visits** delivered by Doernbecher cancer care teams.
 - **273 children enrolled in cancer clinical trials.**
 - **39 active pediatric cancer clinical trials.**
- Doernbecher is home to **Oregon's only pediatric bone marrow transplant and cellular therapy program.**
- **5 dedicated childhood cancer research laboratories**, with additional collaborations across OHSU and the Knight Cancer Institute.