



Breathing Room Foundation

for families affected by cancer

VOLUNTEER TRAINING

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Your organization is a beacon of light for anyone experiencing this horrible disease. Thank you does not seem to be enough. We love you all and hope that we can now continue to spread your good deeds and actions by becoming volunteers. --BRF recipient



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History of the Breathing Room Foundation

The Breathing Room Foundation (BRF) was founded in February 1997 by Diane and Bernie Fitzgerald in the family room of their Jenkintown home. Diane was diagnosed with breast cancer in 1991 and had fought a very difficult battle against the disease. They learned first hand that cancer affects every aspect of a family's life; financially, physically, emotionally, and spiritually. During Diane's six years of chemo, radiation, multiple surgeries and a bone marrow transplant, her family was the recipient of an incredible outpouring of support from their extended family, friends and their community. Their family received regular meal deliveries, rides for their children to school and activities, house cleaning, home improvements as well as emotional and spiritual support.

Diane and Bernie were constantly saying "thank you" but were unsure how to best express their appreciation to their family, friends and community. Throughout their journey, they realized that very few people living with cancer had the large family and friend support that they experienced daily. They wanted to give other families the comfort of experiencing a similar type of support while living with cancer. Diane and Bernie had a vision and began the first steps to making it a reality. They experienced a little "breathing room" every time a hot meal was delivered to their home or a friend drove their children's activities. These small acts of kindness lead to the official name of the Breathing Room Foundation. Diane and Bernie personally selected a group of family and close friends to be the original board members and to insure this vision became a reality.

Sometimes I think I am going to be cured, and this cancer will go away. That may not happen, but I think I am being cured in other ways.

--Diane Fitzgerald, Breathing Room Foundation Co-Founder

Three months after that initial meeting in Diane's family room, she lost her breast cancer battle. Diane witnessed the personalized support given to the first family assisted by the Breathing Room Foundation. Diane lived her life to assist others and left this world with the comfort of knowing that she would continue to make a positive difference in the lives of those who would a diagnosis of cancer.

The Breathing Room Foundation has grown from assisting 3 families in 1997 to more than 2000 families in 2019. Our BRF families live throughout Philadelphia as well as parts of Montgomery, Bucks, Delaware and Chester counties. Our Breathing Room support is offered regardless of type of cancer, age, race or financial situation. What sets us apart is our unique mission to provide individualized support depending on the specific needs of each individual BRF family.



Children's Programs and Special Events

- JANUARY** **Martin Luther King Day of Service:** Spend this school holiday as a day of service with your children by preparing homemade meals, baking treats, making homemade cards or quilt making in your home.
- FEBRUARY** **Valentine's Program:** Valentine goodies are delivered directly to the BRF families. Donate home baked goodies, handmade cards, fuzzy socks, candy and decorative bags. Help assemble and deliver to BRF families.
- MARCH** **Spring & Easter Basket Program:** Donate a personalized child's basket filled with his/her specific items and deliver to the collection site. Volunteers needed to deliver completed baskets to BRF families.
- APRIL** **Golf Outing:** Take a day off from work and golf at the Philadelphia Cricket Club! Help to recruit golfers, register players, and obtain raffle prizes and sponsors.
- APRIL** **Celebration of Life:** Come celebrate with those living with cancer! Help is needed for mailings, raffle prizes, sponsors, ticket sales, and advertisements.
- JUNE 4--
JULY 4** **Summer Fun Program:** Solicit donations from your workplace, local stores, museums, sports teams, and restaurants to supply our families with fun activities and a "vacation from cancer." Purchase items from our BRF Summer Fun Program Amazon Wish List. Deliver goodie bags to families.
- AUGUST** **Back To School Program:** Each family supplies a personalized list of their children's required school supplies. Volunteers gather and sort donations, purchase specific items and deliver the personalized supplies to the BRF families by the weekend before Labor Day.
- OCTOBER** **Valley Road Run:** A 5K run or 2-mile walk along Valley Road, Jenkintown. Help advertise the event, register participants, cheer on the runners and assist police with traffic control.
- OCTOBER** **Designer Bag Bingo:** Enjoy a fun night with friends with designer handbag prizes. Volunteers needed for event setup and breakdown, sell Bingo tickets, solicit raffle prizes, and sell raffle tickets or 50/50 chances.
- NOVEMBER** **Thanksgiving Baskets:** Families are provided with a complete uncooked Thanksgiving dinner. Volunteers are needed to assemble boxed meals for a specific family and deliver to Jenkintown; assemble boxed meals from food donations; or deliver completed meals to families the weekend before Thanksgiving. Baked goods and holiday cards made by children's groups are appreciated.
- NOVEMBER--
DECEMBER** **Holiday Gift Program:** Spread holiday cheer with friends, family, or co-workers by purchasing one item or entire wish lists for a family. Volunteers are needed to bake, make cards, shop and wrap gifts at our collection site. Delivery volunteers are in great demand.
- DECEMBER** **Holiday Party:** Help our BRF families kick off the holiday season with an afternoon of food, crafts, music, holiday secret shopping and a visit from Santa. Volunteers needed to solicit and pick up food donations, help with crafts and games, wrap gifts, and set up and break down. Donations of small parent gift items are greatly appreciated for the children to select and have wrapped.

Meal Program

Home cooked meals are a generous and gratifying gift for a recipient in treatment for cancer. Pulling a homemade meal out of the freezer at the end of a long day allows the parent the extra time to rest or relax with their family. The Breathing Room family can enjoy a satisfying and nourishing meal with minimal effort. The following information provides you with additional understanding of our BRF “Meal Program.”

Meals go out weekly to families ranging in size from one person to larger families with many children. Meals should be frozen to preserve freshness as well as to insure safe transport to the recipient’s home. Allow your meal to cool down before wrapping to avoid moisture build-up. Please use only new aluminum or foil storage containers. Avoid the use of previously used containers to prevent cross contamination. Wrap the meal twice in foil or plastic wrap to insure food safety.

Please label the meal with the date, ingredients and the reheating instructions.

“Thank you for sending us meals and snacks! The girls were so excited to see a variety of snacks. We are very appreciative of your support. While I work full time, we are at a point where the source of disability is changing and we need to figure out how to make it all work . It may be fine, but there are unknowns. Thank you for helping us!”

If you volunteer to cook for a specific family, you will be given information about their individual food likes and dislikes as well as food allergies and dietary restrictions. Pasta is very easy to prepare and freeze. However, many times the recipients are swimming in lasagna and baked ziti. Please try to avoid these meals, if possible.

Homemade baked goods are an easy way to involve your children in the BRF Meal Program. The BRF families love to receive fresh baked cookies, cupcakes and brownies. Please label the name of the baked goods. Peanut allergies are a health concern for some families so please clearly mark that ingredient on your label if you added nuts.

Frozen meals can be delivered to the BRF office to store in our freezers until needed.

BRF MEAL DELIVERY VOLUNTEERS

BRF Volunteers are given the contact information for the family. The BRF Volunteer Coordinator will give you pertinent information as well as possible delivery times for the meals. Please call the family directly to set up a mutually agreeable delivery day and time. Contact the BRF family when you are on your way in case the plan changes at the last minute.

Deliver the frozen meals promptly to insure food safety and avoid contamination. The recipient may need assistance carrying the food to the kitchen and putting it away.

To learn more, contact Eileen@breathingroomfoundation.org or call **215-277-1006**.

Breakfast and Snack Bags

Snack bags are an unexpected surprise for our BRF families to receive and offer the practical support which makes the Breathing Room Foundation (BRF) unique. A ready-made snack bag in the kitchen cabinet, backseat of the car or tucked in a backpack makes daily life a little bit easier. A Breathing Room parent expressed the importance of the BRF snack bags:

"My 4 year old underwent a year of aggressive chemotherapy due to a rare childhood lung cancer that changed everything from her taste buds and sense of smell to giving her severe nausea, mouth sores, vomiting and constipation. Without foods high in calories, my daughter would have needed a feeding tube. While "junk food" may be gawked at by many misunderstanding people, I was incredibly grateful when she ate a lollipop, Cheez-Its, animal crackers and was hydrated with a Capri-Sun. Those snacks were small victories for any parents praying their child would maintain a healthy weight.

The type of feeding tube that most children battling cancer require when their weight drops too low is a tube that is fed up through their nose down into their stomachs. The tube must be changed once a week or more. I heard the cries from other children during that procedure and I am beyond grateful that my daughter was able to get through 8 cycles, around 8 months, without the feeding tube. Every single calorie from those snacks helped. Constantly giving her choices, in a world where most of her choices were decided for her was fun and easy thanks to all the BRF volunteers that assembled and delivered the snack bags directly to my front door."

BRF SNACK BAGS

Add a small water bottle or 100% fruit drink, plus 2 or 3 individually wrapped snacks with a handmade note to a quart size ziploc bag. The snacks may include: granola bars, Goldfish, cookies, raisins, pretzels, etc. Your colorful handwritten "Have a Good Day" or "Thinking of You" note will remind our BRF families that we are thinking of them.

Please no mints or hard candy.

BRF BREAKFAST BAGS

Add a small water bottle or 100% fruit drink and 2 or 3 individually wrapped breakfast food items to a quart size ziploc type bag. Add 2 or 3 of the following items: applesauce, single serve box of cereal, oatmeal pack, breakfast/granola bar or box of raisins to fill the bag. Add a handmade "Have a Good Day" or "Thinking of You" note to the bag.

"What a beautiful surprise! I can't even express how thankful we are. Those snack bags are perfect for chemo days for my husband and me since he is always by my side. Thank you for always showing families like ours how much you truly care about them. Breathing Room--you are like no other."

Delivery Volunteers

Breathing Room Foundation volunteers deliver a variety of items to our Breathing Room families from BRF Comfort Bags, school supplies, homemade meals, medical equipment, snack bags to uncooked Thanksgiving feasts. These guidelines provide details for your delivery.

Call the BRF family before you leave with your delivery.

When delivering for the BRF Children's Programs, the family expects the delivery on a designated day and time but it is best to call before you leave your home or the distribution site so the family knows you are on your way. The BRF Program Coordinator will give you the family's contact information. Call and identify yourself as a BRF volunteer and confirm your delivery time.

The BRF family may not answer since they do not recognize your phone number.

You will usually get a call back after you leave a message or call again in a few minutes. Call again when you get closer to the home to let them know you are a few minutes away. The BRF family may meet you outside and help carry the items if you have a large delivery or if parking is tight on their street.

A BRF recipient may invite you in to meet the family or accept your delivery at the door. Each family responds differently depending on their physical and personal comfort level.

During BRF Children's Program deliveries, you may have items for more than one BRF family in the same zip code.

If no one answers your phone call, knock on the front door in case a family member is home. Some of our BRF recipients need extra time to answer the phone and/or the door. If no one is home, call the BRF Program Coordinator to discuss whether you will return the delivery to the BRF or take it home with you if you are available to arrange an alternate delivery date with the family.

A BRF recipient may ask you questions about other Breathing Room support services or a bill payment.

Please encourage the recipient to contact the BRF Executive Director Mary Ellen Fitzgerald at the office at **215-277-1006** or email Maryellen@breathingroomfoundation.org

Please text or call Eileen at 215-740-3076 or Mary Ellen at 215-570-0530 when you complete deliveries with an update.

Please include your name in your text since we do not have all of your names and phone numbers in our phones.

"Thank you does not seem adequate for all the ways you and your BRF volunteers have enhanced our lives. We never know what the day will bring. The day that we were introduced to your charitable caring actions has been a blessing that we will not soon forget. Every act has been a welcomed one and certainly has given us "Breathing Room."

To learn more, contact **Mary Ellen at 215-570-0530** or **Eileen at 215-740-3076**

Program Collection Site Volunteers

The Breathing Room Foundation (BRF) is a volunteer organization so you are critical to the success of our mission to assist families living with a cancer diagnosis. Our BRF Children's Programs include: Valentine "Share the Love", BRF Spring/Easter, Summer Fun, Back to School, Thanksgiving, and Holiday Programs. The BRF volunteers organize donations and assemble personalized packages to deliver to the BRF families at St. James School Hall in Elkins Park.

These guidelines provide an overview of your volunteer time at St. James School Hall.

BEFORE YOU ARRIVE

Detailed information describing the current program, requested donations, location and parking will be emailed to you as well as posted on our BRF website at www.breathingroomfoundation.org. This includes the exact dates and times volunteers will be needed at St. James School Hall.

Encourage family, friends and coworkers to participate by donating specific items needed for the program. For example, donating Crayola markers, folders and backpacks for our Back to School Program.

WHEN YOU ARRIVE

- Sign in at the BRF Volunteer Sign-In Table right inside the door. You will receive specific guidelines about the current program.
- If you are donating to the program, the volunteer at the Sign-In Table will direct you to the appropriate table for you to drop it off.
- An experienced BRF volunteer will explain the various service opportunities needed at that time. You will shadow a BRF volunteer as you learn what is needed at each workstation. You will meet other volunteers who are working who share your commitment to helping others.
- Beverages and light snacks will be provided.
- Questions or concerns? The BRF Program Coordinator and experienced BRF volunteers are always available to assist you.

BEFORE YOU LEAVE

- Stop at the BRF Volunteer Sign-In Table to document the time you spent volunteering at St. James School Hall. This information is crucial for our future grant applications.

"Cancer depletes so much money, energy, time and resources. Your support helped keep a sense of normalcy. The Breathing Room volunteers put smiles on my children's faces. My kids thought that was so awesome that people we don't know cared enough to give to us."

Office Volunteers

The Breathing Room Foundation (BRF) office volunteers are an integral part of our foundation. Our BRF office volunteers perform a variety of critical services including:

- Acknowledge donors with personalized thank you notes
- Assemble personalized BRF Comfort Bags for new recipients
- Special projects related to Children's Programs and fundraising events
- Photo displays: Create photo boards from recent BRF programs and events
- Bulk mailings: assemble, label and organize large program and event mailings

BRF OFFICE VOLUNTEERS ARE TRAINED BY A BRF STAFF MEMBER

- The staff member will show you where to **sign in and out** when you arrive at the office. This information is crucial for our future grant applications.
- The new BRF volunteer will sit individually with the designated staff member to review the steps needed to complete specific tasks.
- The staff member will be available at all times to answer questions and review results.
- All necessary materials for the project will be provided to the volunteer.

CONFIDENTIALITY

The Breathing Room Foundation respects the privacy of our families and maintains their confidentiality throughout our delivery of services and programs. In many cases, only first names are shared unless a specific volunteer or service requires additional information.

Office volunteers are required to maintain the strictest confidentiality with any personal information they observe while working in the office. Our recipients are entitled to this in all endeavors and they appreciate our discretion.

LOCATION AND PARKING

Our BRF office is located at **600 West Avenue in Jenkintown**. Free parking is available in the back parking lot behind the building. Metered parking is available on West Avenue. Meters are strictly enforced. Our office phone number is **215-277-1006**.

Yard Work Volunteers

Breathing Room Foundation (BRF) Yard Work volunteers provide a huge service to a family living with cancer. Surgery, recovery and cancer treatments often result in exhaustion and physical limitations. Looking out the window at an overgrown yard increases a BRF recipient's stress.

BRF yard work volunteers rake, trim, plant and mow the yard back to a beautiful oasis for the family to relax and enjoy time together. This is an excellent service opportunity for families, corporate groups and teenagers requiring service hours.

These guidelines will help you plan your yard clean-up volunteer time:

- You will be given a list of yard work tasks in advance. It will include the lawn/garden equipment the family will provide for you.
- Brown lawn bags are provided by the family or the BRF.
- Groups should bring additional gardening supplies so everyone can work together.
- Schedule a rain date for your yard work, if possible.
- The BRF family will be contacted two (2) days before your scheduled yard clean up to confirm.
- The BRF family may or may not be home when you are there depending on their schedule.
Please bring your own drinks with you. No restroom will be available for you.
- Please email Eileen@breathingroomfoundation.org when you are done to share the number of volunteers and hours spent doing yard work. This information is important for our future grant funding.
- Please comment on your experience and include any additional needs you feel the family may have shared with you when you were at their home.

Please contact Eileen at **215-277-1006** or **215-740-3076** for more information.

"Having the BRF volunteers do yard work allowed my family to take me to my doctor's appointments."