



## Living Well With Illness - Caregiving and Self Care Programs

### Intended Audience

For all members living with cancer. Especially helpful for those undergoing treatment, recently finished treatment and those who struggle with the anxiety of co-existing with uncertainty.

### Program Description

Living Well with Illness has its origins in Meaningful Life Therapy (MLT), a practice that encourages us to notice the positive sources that help us live actively and constructively while on our cancer journey. MLT reminds us that the fear of death and the desire to live come from the same place. The program's motto "Even though I am ill, I will not live like a sick person," awakens us to our indomitable spirit. The expression "Every day is the best day," inspires us to stay centered and engaged in the here and now. The goal of MLT is, as its name suggests, to carve out a meaningful life in the present moment.

### Benefits and Impact

In Japan the word ikigai (eekyguy) is sacred, meaning sense of purpose or the reason for which one wakes up in the morning. Studies indicate that people with a strong sense of purpose have boosted immune systems, lower stress hormones, and they are better able to grapple with the difficulties of life than those without. MLT embodies this concept and provides a framework for discovering your ikigai. Participants can develop resilience by learning to tap their inner strengths, coexist with their difficult emotions and bring their attention to the present.

### What to Expect at a Session

There will be exercises that may stretch you, along with plenty of self-discovery, joy and camaraderie. Participants will be encouraged to set goals, try new activities and rediscover the places within and without that evoke joy. There will be hands-on writing assignments, creative endeavours, time for stillness, and opportunities to consider unique perspectives. There will also be your stories that illuminate the difficult, ironic and sometimes humorous aspects of your unique journey.

### Reflections from Participants

*"I felt inspired and hopeful, a good place to be."*

*"This helped me tap into the joy I've been missing and set me on a new path."*

*"I have peace for the first time in a long time."*

### What the Research Says:

Aichi Cancer Research Centre in Japan conducted a seven-year survey of 35,000 women between 40-79 years of age. The study showed that fulfillment and meaningfulness in life reduced the incidence rate of breast cancer by 43% (Psychological attitudes and risk of breast cancer in Japan: Springer Science & Business Media B.V. 2007).

The Japan Collaborative Cohort Study (JACC) for the evaluation of Cancer Risk focused on ikigai, a Japanese word defined as the joy and goal of living; the happiness and benefit of being alive we hypothesized that it would have a protective effect on breast cancer development (Psychological attitudes and risk of breast cancer in Japan: a prospective study for the JACC study group. June 2006).

### Program Frequency:

Once per year.

### Related Programs:

All programs related to body, mind and spirit.

