

## WHERE ARE THEY NOW? CASSIE NGUYEN

2015-2016 BIG IDEAS FINALIST FOR SPOTLIGHT ON HOPE FILM CAMP



**How Spotlight on Hope Began:** My name is Cassie Nguyen and I am a pediatric cancer survivor. When I was 16, I learned that I had a malignant brain tumor. Cancer didn't kill me, but, it changed my life forever.

I am now 29. My attention span, memory, and physical abilities are not what they used to be. But I vividly recall the life-and-death battle that often left me anxious, depressed and isolated. While my high school classmates went to dances and attended classes, I was stuck in a hospital, receiving treatments, fighting infections and trying to cope with the double vision that I will have for the rest of my life.

Research tells us that stress is a key contributor to physical and mental illness. But it was my own experience that showed me how essential it is for pediatric and young adult cancer patients and their families to have an outlet to relieve this stress. They need a chance to break out of the cancer bubble and engage in something that brings them together in a joyful and positive way.

**Spotlight On Hope Film Camp**  
Providing creative art outlets that enhance the mental wellness of cancer participants and their families

Each year there are over 14,000 new cancer cases in children ages 0-19 in the US resulting in 1,960 deaths.\*

Spotlight On Hope Film Camp is a free-of-cost filmmaking program that offers a fun, unique and creative therapeutic outlet for children and youth cancer patients.

Through the film camp participants:

- Use their creative imaginations
- Find excitement and mental wellness through film production
- Increase self-worth
- Develop useful career skills

"The program offered me a way to escape into the make believe world we created!" *Joaquin Quinonez, camp participant.*

"The camp helps us deal with the stress that comes along with cancer," *Mary Barajas, parent of camp participants.*

SOH camp participants at '17 screening

SEP '13 Established Spotlight On Hope Film Camp  
June-May '14-'15 Carried out set of classes at UCLA and CHLA  
SEP '15-'17 Established UC, Riverside student org. chapter

FEB '17 Established USC student org. chapter  
APR '17 Contacting UC, Irvine to establish UC Irvine student org. chapter

\*American Cancer Society, (2016)  
\*National Cancer Institute, (2015)

That is why I created Spotlight On Hope Film Camp acronym SOH, a free program that gives cancer patients and their families the opportunity to learn the ins and outs of filmmaking. Under this program, which began in 2013, patients and families learn to create, produce and edit a short film or animation based on their own ideas. When the films are completed, they are presented to family, friends, the community and the producers at a grand red-carpet screening. The filmmakers experience something not normally associated with the word "cancer": They experience pride, a sense of accomplishment, social inclusion, and creativity. They are able to escape into a make believe world limited only by their imaginations.

**Experience with Big Ideas:** I had a wonderful experience with Big Ideas! They offered my tons of support through editing my proposal step by step, offering me guidance with a mentor with whom is still my mentor and helping me with my future plans with Spotlight On Hope Film

Camp. It's been such a great experience and the support they offer both financially and personally is wonderful. They really believe in my dream and that support is priceless.



**How Big Ideas Helped Grow Spotlight on Hope:** Before Big Ideas, SOH had been held at UC Los Angeles School of Theater, Film and Television from 2013-2015 and was already established as a student organization at UC Riverside since 2015-2017. SOH's story and inspiration won a Big Ideas award of \$5,000 in 2017 where we proposed that additional SOH camps would be implemented at the University of Southern California and UC Irvine. Since then, UCR carried out 5 weekend

film workshops and 1 red carpet screening throughout the year that served 8 families/18 participants and USC carried out 3 weekend film workshops and 1 red carpet screening throughout the year that served 5 families/12 participants.

Currently, UCR will be continuing its 4<sup>th</sup> year of SOH film camps serving patients and families from the Inland Empire. We had a lot of success in establishing a SOH student organization at USC's School of Cinematic Arts and created that strong connection and relationship with its leaders in order to successfully carry out and provide SOH film camps to the families in the Los Angeles area. This will be USC's 2<sup>nd</sup> year carrying out an academic year of SOH film camps and screenings where they have already conducted their first film workshop this October.

In addition to implementing the USC SOH organization, new and established partnerships have been formed. Through a new partnership with Make-A-Wish of South Carolina, patient Julia's wish to direct her very own film titled Rachel's Pitch was granted which followed with her winning multiple awards at local film festivals. Through another partnership with SOH's existing fiscal sponsor Dean Productions, a theater program for kids with cancer and their families, 2 collaborative film and theater program events have been carried out that served a total of 7 families/12 participants.

SOH's been nominated to participate in SEED Lab, UCR School of Public Policy's inaugural program for social entrepreneurship this summer 2018 until next spring 2019. The goals the program has for SOH are knowing the ins and outs of scaling to become self-sustainable by registering as a non-profit organization, hiring staff, creating an advisory board, creating, developing and maintaining a website, building up more volunteers and partners, increasing database of clients, implementing a marketing strategy for social media, and establishing a process for grant funding/creating financial stability.

From what we learn, SOH will become a program that delivers consistent quality programming by working with other target markets (i.e. hospitals, cancer and community health organizations, UCs, etc.), other demographics (i.e. age and forms of artistic expression), and new and existing

networks, such as Think Ten Media Group, Dean Productions Theater Company, UCLA School of Theater, Film and Television , Children's Hospital Los Angeles, USC School of Cinematic Arts, Make A Wish of South Carolina, Childhood Cancer Foundation of Southern California, the Donald A. Strauss Foundation, Berkeley Big Ideas and GLUCK Fellows Program of the Arts, Student Life and ASPB Associated Students Program Board at UCR.