**What is Relay For Life?**

CANSA’s Relay For Life is an annual, overnight event where everyone in the community can join in the fight against cancer. Relay For Life is a joined community event not only to raise money but also to CELEBRATEthe lives of those who survived cancer and those still fighting this terrible disease. It’s also an event to REMEMBERthose who we have lost due to cancer; and to FIGHT BACK against a disease that takes too much!

**Relay For Life started by one man’s hope**

The very first Relay was held in Washington in 1985, when Dr Gordon Klatt walked for 24 hours to raise money for cancer research. That first year it raised R24 000. Since then, Relay For Life events around the world have raised over R1.5 billion to support programs to eliminate cancer. Launched in South Africa in 2005, scores of communities have mobilised in the fight against cancer. Relay For Life is rapidly becoming the flagship project of the Cancer Association of South Africa.

**Building a team and more**

To participate in CANSA Relay For Life you recruit friends, family, co-workers and neighbours to join you in a Relay team. In the weeks leading up to the event each team member raises money by collecting donations or holding fundraising events. On the day of Relay team members take turns walking around the track for 12 hours, making sure that someone from their team is on the track at all times. Many don’t sleep that night because cancer doesn’t sleep. In addition to the team members who are walking on the track, hundreds of other participants camp out and together create a community party atmosphere.

**Celebration and inspiration**

Each Relay For Life starts with the Survivors’ and Caregivers’ Lap, a testimony to the fact that so many people today are surviving cancer. Cancer survivors from the community walk the first lap around the oval to celebrate their victories while everyone else cheers them on.

The most inspirational time of Relay For Life is the Luminaria or Candle of Hope Ceremony which takes place after sundown. This is when we honour cancer survivors and remember those who have lost their battle with the disease. A candle bag is filled with sand holding a small candle. When the candle is lit, the candle bag casts a warm golden glow.

**Walking the talk**

Every Relay For Life is a smoke and alcohol free event. This event gives us the opportunity to ‘walk the talk’ and show the community how easy it is to follow a cancer smart lifestyle, reducing the risk of developing cancer through dietary, sun protection and exercise measures.

**History**

Relay For Life was started by the American Cancer Society and it is under their careful tutelage that the Cancer Association of South Africa (CANSA) started the initiative in 2005 with a small pilot project. Not in our wildest dreams did we anticipate what deep tracks Relay For Life would leave on the hearts of ordinary South Africans and how quickly we would see the birth of a compelling survivor movement. CANSA Relay For Life is a unique event that offers everyone in a community the opportunity to participate in the fight against cancer. It represents the hope that those lost to cancer will never be forgotten, that those who face cancer will be supported and that one day cancer will be eliminated. At CANSA Relay For Life, team members take turns to walk or run around a track for 12 hours. Participants enjoy camping-out, entertainment, good food, games and community camaraderie. People who join-in all share a common purpose – their desire to fight cancer and to support CANSA in its work. Relay For Life is:

* a celebration of life for cancer survivors,
* an opportunity to remember the precious moments of loved ones lost to cancer,
* a community joining forces to fight cancer,
* an excuse to stay up all night and celebrate life with family and friends,
* PRICELESS!

The hope was always there that Relay For Life would make a important contribution to keeping the proverbial wolf from the CANSA door and in this short space of time we have seen this programme shoot into the Number 1 position amongst our national community engagement initiatives. Even with a carefully guided and slow roll-out from 3 events (Year 1) to 14 events (Year 2) and 31 events (Year 3) Relay For Life is already boosting income in all 9 our provinces. In 2012/2013, 101 communities will be staging events. The pleasing financial outcomes are obvious and incredibly appreciated as it allows us to address a multitude of cancer challenges in our communities – from our very poor rural communities to our busy metropolitan cities. However, the contribution to the lives of children, men and women living with cancer can never be measured, but must never be underestimated.

**Lifesaving impact of Relay For Life**

Relay For Life is making a significant impact on CANSA’s mission to defeat cancer. Currently here in South Africa 2,600 leadership volunteers will take part in 60 Relay For Life events. These volunteers will recruit 35,000 participants who will hear the lifesaving messages of CANSA. Several thousand cancer survivors will be honoured and participate in Relay For Life. These people are the living testament to the work of CANSA

Through Relay For Life we will raise funds to be spent in research, support and prevention programs to assist the people of SA. In 1950 only 25% of cancer patients survived more than 5 years, today it is 66%.

Take hands with the Cancer Association of South Africa and be part of this unique community event to spread the message of **HOPE**- hope that one day a cure will be found to cure cancer.