

# Fundraising Ideas That Work

by Roger Neugebauer

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*Fundraising is often looked upon as a necessary evil in child care. Centers engage in fundraising to bring in the extra funds needed to ensure a basic level of quality.*

*But fundraising need not be a burden. A survey of Exchange Panel of 200 members disclosed many fundraisers that are not labor intensive, that are fun, that build team spirit, and that provide positive visibility.*

*This article will share a variety of panel members' successful fundraising ideas. In addition, it will provide some tips for success that you can use as guidelines in developing your fundraising plans. For more ideas and more in-depth advice on major fundraisers, you may find the Exchange publication, **Guide to Successful Fundraising**, helpful. You can order this \$10 publication by using the order form opposite page 64 of this issue, or by calling in your credit card order to (800) 221-2864.*

## — SALES —

The most common form of fundraisers is the sale of products or services to parents and community members. Such fundraisers can range from a thrift shop bringing in profits approaching \$100,000 a year to a bake sale netting less than \$100. However, no matter how large your project, you need to take care to secure all necessary permits and pay all applicable taxes.

• **Consignment Sale.** The **Harmony Schools** in Hopewell,

New Jersey, raised \$500 in a consignment sale. Parents brought in good condition items of need for young families, such as clothes, strollers, and cribs, and the center earned a percentage of each sale.

• **Paper Cut-Outs.** As a fundraiser for the Child Abuse Prevention Fund, the **Ebenezer Child Care Centers** in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, sold paper cut-outs of children. Families included their name on each cut-out they purchased, and the cut-outs were displayed like paper-doll chains around the centers.

• **Class Pictures.** A professional photography company took pictures of the centers' children, and **Rainbow Chimes** in Huntington, New York, realized 50% of the profits of the sale of the pictures to parents and grandparents. The organization raised \$4,000 with this project.

• **Spa Days.** As Mother's Day gifts, the **Beginnings Child Care Center** in Lake Worth, Florida, sold "A Day at the Spa" for \$90. The spa day included a Swedish massage, mineral pools, saunas, and a deep cleansing facial, all donated by a local resort.

• **Gourmet Coffee.** The **Willow Woods Child Development Center** in Kansas City, Missouri, made \$400 by selling gourmet coffee to parents. The center purchased 22 flavors of coffee wholesale in single pot packs and sold them prior to the holiday season in their centers with a minimum purchase of 50 packets.

• **Supermarket Coupons.** The **Children's Learning Center** in Yardley, Pennsylvania, earns from \$100 to \$200 per week from the sale of supermarket certificates to parents. The center pays \$950 for every \$1,000 in certificates it buys from two local supermarkets.

• **Candy Sales.** Every March, the parents at **Children's Discovery Center** in Toledo, Ohio, sell candy in time for Easter. In 1995, candy sales resulted in a profit of \$9,500.

• **Book/Toy Store.** Every October, the **Harper Learning Center** at William Raney Harper College in Palatine, Illinois, holds two book and toy sale days at their center. Parents recruit local vendors and sales representatives for national companies to set up tables in the center's lobby. The center receives from 15% to 40% of each company's sales, resulting in a profit of from \$1,000 to \$3,000 per year.

• **Plant Sales.** Twice a year, **Smoky Row Children's Center** in Powell, Ohio, earns \$1,000 from the sale of plants. In November, the center sells poinsettia plants; in the spring, it sells bedding plants and hanging baskets.

• **Art Auction.** The **Monadnock Community Day Care Center** in Peterborough, New Hampshire, raised over \$10,000 with an art auction. The center approached local artists and asked them to donate one piece of art. The art was sold in a formal auction at the city hall.

• **Hoagie Sales.** Periodically, the **Crafton Children's Center** in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, raises money by selling hoagies to parents. The staff prepares the sandwiches in their own kitchen and realizes a profit of 50% on all sales.

### — EVENTS —

Events can combine pleasure with profits. They can be fun, but they also can be a lot of work. Centers have experienced success with fundraising events as ambitious as golf tournaments and as modest as a morning tea.

• **5K Run.** This year, the **Hi-Hello Day Care Center** in Freeport, New

York, raised over \$9,000 by sponsoring the second annual Waterfront 5K Run/Walk. A professional race organizer took care of managing, measuring, and timing the race.

The center was in charge of promotions, registrations, refreshments, and prizes. In addition to the 5K run and the non-competitive 5K walk, the center also organized short fun runs for children.

• **RockerThon.** An annual event of the **Great Beginnings Christian School** in Canoga Park, California, is the RockerThon. Staff members secure pledges and try to rock for up to 24 hours (one year, five teachers lasted the whole time). The center has raised from \$1,000 to \$4,000 a year with this event.

• **Children's Concert.** The **Good Samaritan Hospital Child Care Center** raised \$500 by sponsoring a concert by Hugh Hanley. The center paid the performer's minimal fee, booked an auditorium, and sold tickets in the community.

• **Gala Dance.** By holding a dinner dance for two consecutive years, the **Springfield Day Nursery** in Springfield, Massachusetts, has been able to raise over \$55,000 for a scholarship fund. The black tie affair is held in the ballroom of a local hotel.

• **Fashion Show.** For five years, the **Samaritan Child Care Center** in Troy, New York, has sponsored a children's fashion show. The event is held in the auditorium of a local community college. Children from the center, walking with their parents, model clothing provided at a discount by a local store. Local businesses pay for ads in the program. The event generates proceeds of around \$4,000 a year.

• **Wine/Food Tasting.** In Fremont,

California, **Tri-Cities Children's Centers** has sponsored "Tri-City Treats" for eight years. Area restaurants and wineries set up tasting booths for the local Hilton hotel. Mayors of area towns act as judges for the food and wine and award plaques to the winners. A newspaper provides all the publicity, a community college provides musical entertainment, and other businesses underwrite all other event expenses. As a result, the child care organization makes 100% profit on ticket sales, with this year's proceeds exceeding \$10,000.

### — GAMES OF CHANCE —

Lotteries, bingo, and raffles raise large amounts of money for educational and charitable activities in this nation. Early childhood organizations often have difficulty justifying participation in these high stakes ventures. However, centers have found many creative ways to raise funds with fun, low key games of chance.

• **Chinese Auction.** The **Children's Space** in Salem, New Jersey, had a fun evening with a Chinese auction. Parents and staff solicited donations from local merchants. At the event, these donated items were displayed on tables with a bowl for each one. Participants buy tickets and place them in the bowl for each item they would like to win. At the end, one ticket is drawn from each bowl to determine the winners. Last year, the auction netted over \$1,500.

• **Raffles.** Many organizations use raffles as fundraisers, either separately or as part of other activities. For example, the **Marriott Child Development Center** in Bethesda, Maryland, raised \$2,500 by raffling weekend hotel packages donated by their corporate sponsor. The **Euclid Avenue Preschool** in Cleveland,

Ohio, holds an annual Mother's Day Raffle in which "gifts for mother," such as dinners at nice restaurants, manicures, a dance cruise, and a night of babysitting, are the prizes.

- **Egg Hunt.** The owners of a jewelry store came up with a creative way to help the **Fairfax-San Anselmo Children's Center** in Fairfax, California. The store filled 1,000 plastic Easter eggs with jelly beans. In 20 of these eggs, they also inserted gemstones. In one egg, they inserted a 21 carat diamond (in honor of the center's 21st anniversary). The eggs were displayed colorfully in the jewelry store's front window. The center mailed invitations to 3,500 people on their mailing list and that of the jewelry store encouraging them to join the egg hunt by buying an egg for at least a \$3 donation.

### — APPEALS —

Sometimes the easiest way to raise money is to ask for it directly. What you are selling is the value of your service to the community. Success depends as much upon the reputation of your organization as it does on the means of making the appeal. Before launching a major appeal, be sure to check out all applicable rules and regulations.

- **Letter/Phone Appeal.** In Madison, New Jersey, the **FM Kirby Children's Center** raised \$10,000 for a playground through an appeal for donations. A letter was mailed to all parents. Then one parent in each classroom called all parents who had not responded and reminded them that any donation, no matter how small, would be welcomed.

- **Care Shares.** When the local Kiwanis Club in Cannon Beach, Oregon, adopted the **Cannon Beach**

**Children's Center**, it came up with the idea of selling local residents "Care Shares for Quality." Shares were sold for \$20 donations. Donors received official looking stock certificates.

- **Annual Letter.** For 24 years, the board of the **Calvin Hill Day Care Center** in New Haven, Connecticut, has been sending out an annual appeal for donations. Each board member mails anywhere from 5 to 15 letters asking for a donation in any amount. This letter brings in about \$5,000 a year.

- **Deposit Donations.** One way **Early Childhood Options of University Circle** in Cleveland, Ohio, raises money for its scholarship fund is to ask parents to donate all or part of their deposit when they leave the program. Most parents have forgotten they made the

deposit and gladly donate it to the fund.

- **Newsletter Appeal.** The board newsletter of **Long Beach Day Nursery** in Long Beach, California, is used as a fundraising as well as a communication tool. The newsletter, which is mailed four times a year to 2,800 individuals, includes a progress report on the organization's three centers, a list of recent donors, a wish list of items the centers currently need, and a reply envelope for sending in donations.

- **Adopt an Item.** In Fort Worth, Texas, the **St. Stephen Presbyterian Day School** periodically displays pictures of items the center needs along with their prices. Center parents and church members "adopt" an item by donating the price of a specific item.

### Share Your Fundraising Successes

The 25,000 readers of *Child Care Information Exchange* are always eager for new field-tested ideas. If your organization has had success with a fundraising idea, we encourage you to share it.

Send in a brief description of your idea, along with a copy of your center's logo, to:

"Exchange Success Stories"  
PO Box 2890  
Redmond, WA 98073

Then watch for your idea to appear in the BRAVO! section of an upcoming issue.

## Tips for Fundraising Success

- 1. Make sure it's time efficient.** People's time is a valuable resource and should not be squandered on fundraising projects that generate a small return on time invested. Successful projects generate anywhere from \$25 to \$150 per hour of time invested. Any project that generates less than \$10 an hour should be viewed as a poor investment. For example, a few parents at the **Bethany Early Childhood Learning Center** in Highland Park, Illinois, raised over \$2,000 wrapping gifts at holiday time with a minimal investment of time.
- 2. Sell what people already plan to buy.** It is easier to sell someone something they already intend to buy than to create an interest. **Brooklyn Heights Montessori School** in Brooklyn, New York, for example, sells Christmas trees and clears between \$10,000 and \$12,000 per year. The **Gresham Heights Learning Center** in Gresham, Oregon, sells take-home spaghetti dinners. Parents pre-order the dinners, and then the staff makes spaghetti, sauce, garlic bread, and salad and packs it in to-go boxes.
- 3. Make it an annual event.** There are several advantages to turning a successful fundraiser into an annual event. Usually the second time you do a project you can benefit from all the organizing that went into the initial effort — it will take less time and you won't repeat your mistakes the second time. In addition, if an event becomes an annual tradition, people will look forward to it, and set aside time and money for it. For example, **St. Rita's Child Care Center** in Dayton, Ohio, has held its auction every year for the past 11 years. Probably the longest running benefit for an early childhood program is the Westport Handcrafts Fair, an annual benefit for the **Westport Weston Cooperative Nursery School** in Westport, Connecticut, this year being held for the 30th consecutive year.
- 4. Build on your strengths.** When thinking of a fundraising idea, you should think first about sticking to your knitting. Think of a project where you can use the skills and experience your organization already possesses. For example, the **Illinois State University Child Care Center** in Normal, Illinois, organizes and sells first aid travel kits for cars. **Children's for Children** in Cincinnati, Ohio, sponsors a one day early childhood conference for local caregivers which brings in about \$3,000 per year.
- 5. Team up with other organizations.** Sometimes a small child care organization can participate in a large fundraising project by joining forces with other local organizations. In Colorado Springs, the city, the library district, the park department, and the **Care Castle** intergenerational child care center are developing an intergenerational garden where flowers will be planted in memory/honor of grandparents, parents, and grandchildren. In Lansing, Michigan, several community organizations, including **St. Vincent's Home for Children** and the **Community Nursery School**, cooperate in sponsoring an annual raffle. By joining forces, they are able to offer prizes as big as automobiles.
- 6. Make it unique to your organization.** To make for an appropriate and memorable fundraiser, tie the project into a unique feature of your organization. The **Fruit and Flower Day Nursery** in Portland, Oregon, for example, sells "Fruit and Flower" holiday baskets as a fundraiser.
- 7. Tie it to a celebration.** Major events in the history of your organization present high profile opportunities to raise funds. For example, the **Early Childhood Enrichment Center** in Shaker Heights, Ohio, used the occasion of its 20th birthday to set up a 20th Anniversary Endowment Fund for scholarships. **St. Michael's Day Nursery** in Wilmington, Delaware, used the celebration of its 100th anniversary to raise over \$300,000.
- 8. Capture the PR value of your fundraiser.** Fundraising projects can increase the visibility of your organization in addition to generating funds. In the long run, the heightened recognition from a fundraiser may be of more value than the funds raised. For example, when the **Fairfax-San Anselmo Children's Center** in Fairfax, Virginia, conducts its annual fundraiser, it hangs a banner over a city street announcing "Annual Back to School Haircut Marathon" along with the center's name.