

Putting the “Fun” Back in Fundraising

by Dawn Marie Barhyte

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on early childhood topics, child development, and parenting issues. For over 20 years she met the needs of children and their families co-directing, teaching, and coordinating children's programs. She continues her commitment to children and touches their lives through her writing.

One of my favorite fundraising moments happened years ago during a sweltering July when as a co-director I decided to host a Christmas in July rummage sale with water games at my center. The local firehouse loaned us a dunking booth. Staff, parents, and children alike, giddy with excitement, lined up to take a shot at

“dunking the director.” Fortunately, it was summer; because I spent a lot of time in the water. The children cooled off by snacking on snow cones and trying out our makeshift water slide. Parents and staff were good sports getting into the fun by boomeranging water balloons at each other. We managed to make a profit with the summer sale. More importantly, it was a fun day that allowed us to make new friends; kids channeled some energy while cooling off; and we shared priceless, lighthearted moments that enriched our allegiance to each other. We also gave members of our community a break from the heat. They'll be more likely to support our organization

in the future through word-of-mouth referrals and future fundraising. When it comes to child care, our name will be fresh in their minds.

Consider expanding your role to include the fundraising hat and you'll see that the possibilities are endless!

Directors as fundraisers

Directors are in a key position to give centers an overall boost by holding fundraisers. It is no secret that many centers are operating on a shoestring budget and could use additional revenue. As state and federal support decreases and budgets continue to shrink, there is growing pressure to supplement budgets with monies from other sources. Fundraising can provide a solution and boost your bottom line.

Today many child care centers around the country are turning to fundraising as lucrative moneymakers and so can you. While it may seem intimidating and time consuming, fundraising can lead to solid financial support, making it well worth the effort.

The many purposes of fundraising

Although raising money is the primary reason to hold a fundraising event, it's not the only one. You can also:

- raise the profile of your center
- cultivate community support for your organization
- foster a sense of community spirit
- boost staff morale
- harness the creative energy of your staff
- create a sense of shared purpose that can unify staff and promote camaraderie

Holding a successful fundraiser is a lot like running a small business; it requires the same time and effort and both share the goal of making a profit. While fundraising can be demanding, it is possible to streamline the process and maximize results.

Before you fundraise

Before you begin fundraising activities, you need to:

- be clear about what you hope to accomplish
- identify your target audience
- identify organizational resources available to produce the event
- clarify why you are raising money
- decide how the money will be used
- evaluate the benefit to your organization

If you are looking for some fresh ideas or some novel ways to spruce up your

existing fundraising campaign, this article will offer tips to achieve your fundraising goals and to capture your fair share of available monies to subsidize your program. The reality is you'll be juggling a host of other responsibilities while coordinating a fundraiser; but no matter what your fundraising goals are, fundraising can be fun!

A fundraising idea

Host an art auction utilizing volunteers and art donated and designed by staff, parents, local artists, and your center's children. To ensure a good turnout, do it on a weekend and provide free child care that evening. You are guaranteed a captive audience. For the little ones' enjoyment keep it interactive by setting up a classroom with an assortment of open-ended art materials and age-appropriate projects that can be completed in an evening. Auction off art for a fair price to the highest bidder and you'll undoubtedly make a profit. Ask local artists to serve the refreshments and mingle with your audience.

When working as a co-director for a child care center, I found members of my local art league were thrilled to be included, to have an opportunity to showcase their works, and perhaps make a sale. Parents wanted to purchase their children's creations, too. Staff and children's self-esteem and morale were high as they watched their treasures being sought after. We raised some funds that came in handy when planning our direct sales campaign.

Select the ideal fundraising program

- determine how much money your program needs to raise
- identify available resources (volunteers, cost, time)

- boost community awareness (through media and word-of-mouth)
- conduct a cost-benefit analysis to determine if the potential benefit of the event is worth the time, money, and effort required to carry it off
- schedule fundraisers throughout the year to avoid competing with other organizations' fundraising events
- know your target audience (income level, purchasing habits, giving)

While there are many fundraising options to choose from, product sales are consistently the most effective and financially-rewarding approach to fundraising. In the article "Fundraising Fundamentals: Elements for Raising Money through Product Sales," the Association of Fundraising Distributors and Suppliers said research has found that 75% of Americans and eight out of ten parents will purchase fundraising products each year. The vast majority of sales are made to relatives, friends, and co-workers.

Today there are hundreds of fundraising products and programs available that maximize an organization's financial return and minimize the time investment of volunteers and staff. Better still, many products have stood the test of time and are reasonably guaranteed to succeed. These companies will work closely with your organization every step of the way to help volunteers raise funds.

From my experience it pays to spend a little more to make more. Maybe you can learn from my mistake:

As junior volunteer coordinator of a community hospital we compiled apple cookbooks to be sold at our annual Apple Fest. We didn't do well even though we were giving away free apples which were donated from a local farm. The cookbook recipes were first-rate, but the presentation was ho-hum. Had we invested some money in printing the cookbooks with a more professional look, I think we would

have done better. As a result of our haste and frugality, we had to store hundreds of unwanted cookbooks.

Choosing a fundraising company

Russell Lemiex, executive director of the Association of Fundraising Distributors and Suppliers suggests focusing on five key areas when choosing a fundraising company.

How long has the company been in the product fundraising business?

Companies with a track record are more likely to anticipate and meet an organization's needs.

What services does the company offer and how much do they cost?

Depending on groups' specific needs, services (e.g., incentive programs, kick-off parties) can improve efficiency and financial success.

How will the company handle problems that arise?

Discuss how the company will handle unforeseen problems that occur (e.g., incorrect or damaged products).

What is the company's reputation?

Ask for a list of references and check them out. Talk to peers about the company and your local representative.

Are they a member of the Association of Fundraising Distributors and Suppliers?

For a free list of Association of Fundraising Distributors and Suppliers offering products and services in your state and community, write 57775 Peachtree-Dunwoody Rd., Atlanta, GA; call (404) 252-3663; or e-mail afdrs@assnhg.com.

Hosting a fundraising event

Special events can be organized as an alternative method of raising capital. You don't have to be a fundraising

professional to pull one off, either. The advantages of events are:

- they are fun and entertaining
- they foster good public relations
- your dollars are available on the spot

Potential disadvantages are:

- they require a committed group of volunteers, time, and effort to organize
 - they require an initial outlay of funds
- To offset costs host a fundraising event to raise cash so you can then choose a more costly event. It's a win-win.

For organizations with a dedicated group of volunteers who enjoy the social nature of sponsoring such events and are up to the challenge, these can be a good choice. They usually generate good press coverage and ticket sales can be robust. Keep in mind that the more unusual your fundraising ideas, the more people will support them. Good ideas are good cash generators, too. Use this list to spark your imagination and provide inspiration for your group as you plan for events and activities. Appeal to your staff and volunteers' whimsical side and get creative!

A host of fundraising events

Food-and-Drink Events: These range in scope and price. Savor the possibilities by featuring a basic meal like a pancake breakfast or unlimited bowls of spaghetti. Particularly popular now are wine-tastings, luncheons with fashion shows, dinners featuring ethnic foods, and tea parties.

Holiday Bazaar: Set up a delightful and tantalizing selection of homespun crafts and goodies just in time for the winter holidays. Ask teachers, staff, and parents to contribute. Charge admission and hold raffles for prizes donated by local merchants. Get local cable stations or

Here are some fundraising companies and resources to get started:

- **Cookbook Publishers, Inc.** — the first company to reproduce recipes as a unique fundraiser — (800) 227-7282 • info@cookbookpublishers.com
- **Current** — cards, wrapping paper, snacks — (877) 665-4481 • currentfundraisercustomerservice@current.com
- **Dutch Mill Bulbs** — imported guaranteed-to-bloom bulbs at below-garden shop prices — (800) 533-8824, ext. 226 • www.dutchmillbulbs.com
- **Mr. Fundraising** — helping hundreds of loyal customers since 1969 sell quality fundraising products — (800) 637-3828 • www.mrfundraising.com
- **EkidsFundraising.com** — quality snacks from chocolate to popcorn (888) 474-5900 • help@ekidsFUNdraising.com
- **Fundraising Depot** — one of the oldest and largest selections to choose from — (800) 327-0322
- **Itsmartwork.com** — does amazing things with children's art, transfers designs on note cards, bookmarks, etc. — (877) 300-8922 • sales@itsmyartwork.com
- **Morris Cookbooks** — customized cookbooks; typesets collected recipes — (800) 445-6621 • www.morriscookbooks.com

radio stations to advertise and you'll double your profits.

Auctions: Hold an auction with goods and services that are donated by local merchants. Useful services such as babysitting, dog walking, tutoring, yard work, haircuts, and manicures are all community favorites.

Bake Sales: Home baked goodies can't be beat. Have parents and staff bake cookies, pies, cakes, and brownies to sell. Add an extra flair by choosing a theme, such as baked goods from around the world. Consider charging a small entrance fee and give awards for the best pie, cookie, or cake and then auction it off to the highest bidder.

Cook-Offs: Novice chefs are going to line up to compete for the best apple recipe, chili, or cookie. You decide on a theme and contestants pay to compete. Invite families in your center to taste and rate the dishes. Ask for a donation at admission.

Bingo Party: Always popular and entertaining, this event is run in the traditional manner. You charge a set fee per card. Instead of money for prizes, give away donated merchandise from local merchants.

Book Sale: Another old favorite. People are sure to donate books and book lovers are sure to buy them. Have community members bring in old books that you then sell for a buck a book.

Book Fairs: An excellent way to promote the importance of reading between parent and child. The best time to hold a book fair is in the fall when you hold a parent-teacher night or an open house.

Raffles: Raffles are a fun and simple way to raise cash and one bound to earn you an enthusiastic reaction from the community. Ask local businesses to donate prizes and hold the drawing at a special event.

Rummage Sales: One person's junk is another person's treasure. Although a huge undertaking, rummage sales are a good way to generate cash. Hold the event in the fall or spring when people traditionally clean out their closets. Involve your families by asking them to donate their used toys, books, and clothes to benefit the center. Try making up theme baskets with the help of your staff like gardening lovers' or cooks' delight.

Engraved Bricks: People like to leave a lasting impression, so give them an opportunity to leave their mark. Sell engraved bricks or ceramic tiles that will be used in your center's walkway or playground.

Pet Show: Pet lovers are notorious for wanting to show off their beloved buddies. Charge an entry fee and get donated prizes from pet stores and local vets for categories such as best dressed, cutest, most charming, and best trained, just to name a few.

Collectible Cookbooks: Is your cheesecake recipe to die for? Are your friend's brownies deliciously decadent? If so, others might think so, too. Compile staff, parents', and friends' recipes and make up a customized cookbook to sell at one of your fundraisers or community events. There are many organizations that will help you produce a charming keepsake.

Art Show and Auction: Invite community members, relatives, and parents to view artwork created by your staff and children. Charge an entrance fee and hold an auction to raise money. Consider using original artwork to create note cards, bookmarks, and calendars to sell.

Carnivals and Street Fairs: These kid-

friendly fundraisers will build your visibility. More than being money-makers, they are a *friend-raiser*. Tie it in with a local festival to boost attendance and profits. My town has an Apple Fest every fall that has over 200 craftspeople. We have a special section just for children, complete with games, petting zoo, sand art, face painting, and a puppet show. It's great fun for the community to get to know you and your services at this family-friendly event.

Costume Parties: Choose a theme or an occasion such as Halloween and send out invitations to families and post fliers around town (e.g., post office and library) to increase community awareness. Charge admission for the masquerade as well as for the refreshments, which you can have donated to cut costs.

As we all know, it costs money to run a high-quality early childhood program. More money in our budgets could mean new classroom supplies, enrichment programs, outdoor equipment, and staff development. With effort and know-how, you can create a fundraising campaign that will support your program and its future — and have fun in the process!

For more information

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