

Cal Poly Rodeo Partnering with Jack’s Helping Hand

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INTRODUCTION

As advanced as society has become in technology and medicine, children are still affected with a multitude of incurable diseases. When a child is diagnosed with cancer, it can be a financial burden for the family in addition to the downfalls of a patient suffering from that disease (Christos, 2015). For a family to manage the toll cancer puts on them, they need assistance to relieve them financially and emotionally. “Jack’s Helping Hand (JHH) was created to assist children in the community with cancer and special needs who have unmet physical, mental and medical needs,” (Jack’s Helping Hand, 2018). This project is coordinating a fundraiser that will financially help the children in JHH. It will be held during Cal Poly’s prestigious Poly Royal college rodeo, while the Cal Poly Rodeo Team gave JHH children a presentation.

Based out of San Luis Obispo, JHH is a local non-profit organization which, “provides assistance for children suffering from medical diseases such as cancer” (Borges, 2018). One of JHH’s services is a therapeutic horsemanship program called Little Riders. Being around horses has health benefits for body motion, can reduce feelings of tension, anger, and stress and encourage communication (Michigan State University, 2013). For the past year, the Cal Poly Rodeo Program has teamed up with JHH, putting on a “special rodeo” for JHH children to compete in. While the event provides a healthy and fun activity for the kids to enjoy, Little Riders and a special rodeo do not address the financial stress families are pressured by. Extensive medical bills can begin to become a burden on their lives, an average family with a child suffering from cancer is spending about 5.7% of their weekly budget on medical bills (Lansky, et al,1983).

Background

Leading a fundraiser for the families in JHH, the author strategized through numerous meetings and researched fundraising techniques. Social media, like Facebook, is a beneficial platform for donations. Like most international disaster relief charities who use social media to raise money, many smaller organizations can translate the same techniques for their own local causes (McCurry, 2010). JHH has a large friend list on its Facebook site that grows with every post. According to a social media survey, it is reported almost 57% of the respondents said they followed a charity or non-profit on Facebook, and over half follow 1-3 organizations at a time (Amar, 2014). Trying to find more methods for donations, the author found that 7.2% of total nonprofit fundraising came from online giving. Also, in 2016, 17% of online transactions were made using a mobile device (Bacon, 2017).

JHH has upheld a strong reputation in the San Luis Obispo County over the years. The organization is recognized in the community because its mission is to provide community programs that meet the unique challenge of children with cancer or special needs under the age of 21 (“Jack’s Helping Hand, 2018). People want to hear about how you make an impact, they want to feel part of your cause (Bacon, 2017).



Volunteers and Director for JHH



CONCLUSIONS

The money raised from the Friday night rodeo was a success compared to the lower than expected number of spectators in attendance. After seeing the outcome of the second night's performance, the director wished the fundraiser took place both nights of the rodeo. Although the goal of the fundraiser was not reached, the money raised exceeded the amount of people in the stands on Friday night.

Continuing this fundraiser at Poly Royal in the future, the author recommends generating more public awareness before the event takes place. As executed, the fundraising efforts could not be directly associate with Cal Poly Rodeo, due to university policies. However, the author suggests incorporating more publicity through Jack’s Helping Hand social media and communications. The public needs to be emotionally connected to the children for the fundraiser to be a success. Highlighting the children in the Little Riders program on Facebook by promoting a child benefitting from JHH would help connect a face to the story that people are donating to. Raising awareness in a way people can relate to remains the first step to getting people to give (Pearmen, 2014). The posts on social media before the Poly Royal Rodeo need to be planned and connect the children’s stories with the potential donors prior to the fundraising event.

Children of JHH getting their awards in the arena.



Audience holding up their green cards.



Methodology

For this project, social media will be used as an awareness effort for the fundraiser, but also a platform for donors to contribute money. The author’s posts generated before the fundraiser were all scheduled around the JHH social media calendar. Using the fundraising and social media relationship to help raise money on Facebook, the author connected the children to the public with every post. Relating the posts back to the public, the author carefully explained donations will help these children live the life they have always wanted.

Expecting a sold-out crowd in Spanos Stadium, the author of this fundraiser had to recruit many volunteers for additional assistance. In order to be successful, the fundraiser needs to be kept simple and find a way to emotionally connect to the public (Burt, 2018). The director of this fundraiser reached out to many Cal Poly and Cuesta clubs, sororities, fraternities, and local businesses to find volunteers. The volunteers would help explain the story of the children in JHH to the rodeo spectators to spread the importance of reaching the \$10,000 goal. The author secured 25 volunteers and developed an informational sheet to guide their efforts and sent it via email to the volunteers two days prior to the event. Working with the rodeo coach, the author created a hashtag, #passtheboot, to help engage social media activity during the event. The author gathered seven pairs of boots to be passed around for donation collections.

Before the rodeo started, the author assigned each volunteer an area in the stadium to focus their fundraising efforts. The volunteers used the informational template provided by the director to explain the goals and story of JHH. Also, the volunteers were assigned to pass out JHH green cards to each person in attendance, so later in the performance the stadium would be “greened out” for these children. The green card was another strategy to get the crowd connected to the children in JHH by representing their organizations color green. JHH had a video testimonial prepared prior to the rodeo. The emotionally touching video was shown on the big screen during the rodeo and starred Bridget Ready, JHH’s CEO. She told the story of Jack and why the organization was started; clips of the children competing in the special rodeo with the help of the Cal Poly Rodeo Team were also aired. The donations in Spanos Stadium started rolling in from the cash donations coming from the #passtheboot technique, as cowboy boots were used as piggy banks to pass through the stadium and fill with money.

RESULTS

The event efforts to strategically pass a JHH green card to everyone in the stands prior to the video worked well as the audience had something tangible to participate with the event. The video of the JHH story touched the hearts of everyone in attendance and seemed to encourage giving. The stadium fell silent as the emotional video had spectators drawn to watch the story of these amazing children. After the video, Spanos Stadium was totally “greened out” as the crowd roared and held up their green cards in support for the children in JHH being recognized in the middle of the arena with new western attire.

As the children exited the arena wearing their new cowboy hats and buckles, volunteers started collecting boots and boots filled with cash. The #passtheboot technique was a financial success. After counting cash donations from the cowboy boots, mobile donations from Facebook, Venmo, and Paypal combined, the fundraiser was able to raise \$5,200.19 for the children of JHH.

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