



## How a Small Organization Turned a Too-Big Event into a Successful Awareness and Fundraising Fun Run

### THE EVENT

The Hearing, Speech, and Deaf Center in Washington State is an organization that focuses on people with hearing and speech challenges. With three locations, they serve the areas in and surrounding Bellingham, Seattle, and Tacoma. Their mission is to foster inclusive, accessible communities through communication, advocacy, and education. HSDC envisions an inclusive, accessible world, where everyone is understood and respected. They make sure everyone has the tools to communicate without barriers.

HSDC is made up of five departments: the Audiology department provides hearing-related health services such as providing hearing checks, the Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing department concerns the advocacy side of things and ensures clients have everything they need outside of the organization, the Speech Clinic provides speech therapy and aural rehabilitation, Interpreting Services sends interpreters out to businesses and anyone who may need them, and the Education department.

The Education department offers valuable programs, including the Parent-Infant Program. This program is for new parents who have a child born with hearing challenges; it's completely free and provides needed supplies to families. Parents can work with a specialist to learn how to best communicate with their child. After completing the Parent-Infant Program, there are two preschools parents can choose to send their children to—HSDC recommends one based on each child's unique needs.

The Ned Behnke Speech-Language Preschool is an oral environment focused on speech and language. The other, the Rosen Family Preschool, focuses on a bilingual approach in American Sign Language and English. It's not a predominantly oral environment and voices are turned off while signing.

### THE CHALLENGE

HSDC's peer-to-peer event started out as a 5K fundraiser with a mini-1K during the event. For an organization that places such an emphasis on children and families, the all-day event and 5K wasn't very family-friendly for the ages of children they serve (birth to age 5). The event took place in a completely different city from the office in Seattle, the cost made the return on investment negligible, and it just wasn't a good fit. A couple of years ago a parent suggested doing the 1K as a standalone event so it was more family-friendly. It would also be easier to bring it closer to their central hub in Seattle.

## THE SOLUTION

HSDC took that parent's suggestion and turned their event into a 1K family-friendly run they call the Froggy Fun Run. By changing their event to cater to their base of families and children, they made it easier for parents and families to get involved. It's just a few hours out of a morning, instead of an all-day event.

The event is held at a local park, which really cuts down on costs and eliminates the need for planning a 5K course. The overall cost to run the event is below \$2,000. Last year, the Froggy Fun Run doubled their participation over the previous year and raised \$14,755 dollars—that's 123% of the event's fundraising goal and a fantastic return on investment!

"Sometimes we tend to think large. The 5K was too large, the return on investment wasn't making sense, and it was really too much for the organization and the size we are. Scaling it down to that 1K made it really manageable, but it's not something that a lot of people think about doing." – Renee Look

## THE SPECIFICS

The Froggy Fun Run is geared toward families and people in the community who don't necessarily know what HSDC does, and also for the families who are served through their programs or the two preschools. HSDC has done a great job of weaving together fundraising and awareness. During the event, there are great opportunities to learn about the organization and what it does.

Prior to the event, each department sets up a booth. Before running the 1K, kids receive a stamp card that they must fill up by visiting each department's booth. While kids are enjoying the fun of a stamp scavenger hunt, parents can learn about what each department does. When the card is filled, kids can drop it in a box at any of the booths to be entered in a raffle for prizes. There's also free food, face painting, and craft stations.



**Get Stamped!**

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

Get a sticker from each table, drop your completed card in the box on any of the tables, and **win a prize!**

	Audiology & Hearing Aids	
	Speech, Language & Literacy	
	SignOn ASL Interpreting	
	Hard of Hearing & Deaf Services	
	Early Education	



While families are exploring what each department has to offer, there's also an ASL story time—everyone gathers around to have a story read to them in ASL. After the story, everyone heads outside to the park and takes part in the Froggy Fun Run, which is followed by another ASL story time.



The money all goes to the Early Learning Scholarship Fund for parents who can't afford to pay tuition to put their child in the Behnke Preschool. Funds also support the Parent-infant program. Right now, the public school system is paying for students to be in the Rosen Family Preschool, but HSDC is looking at ways to use scholarship funds for that, as well.

To get the word out about the event, HSDC sends out multiple emails, distributes fliers, and has conversations with parents at their preschools so they can reach out to their networks, as well. Renee emphasizes that social media is an incredibly important part of promoting events. Before the 2016 event, someone shared the event information with a parent group at Amazon that focuses on parents with deaf children. HSDC saw registration for the event jump significantly that day, and they are pretty sure that's why! You never know who might see your event and share it on social media!

## **STRATEGIES**

HSDC did a fantastic job of truly listening to participants and connecting with them at a one-on-one level. Instead of sending out mass emails, Renee sent individual emails of welcome and encouragement to participants and donors. She included ideas on how participants could raise more money and status reports along the way. Yes – time-consuming – but you can do it! HSDC has a small staff, but the time and effort was worth it!

Renee credits the event's success to a combination of connecting with participants and engaging the tight-knit community of parents involved with the organization. Many of the parents have known each other since their children were born because of the Parent-Infant Program. By creating a close group of supporters outside of the event who are in constant contact with organization staff, HSDC ensures they'll always have enthusiastic participants who act as evangelists for the organization!

“Those parents really drove it. They've seen their children change and benefit from the services our organization provides and they want to be sure other children know about and have access to them. They had a direct line to me, so I made sure to answer whatever questions they had and that they got the tools they needed (within reason!).”

## **HOW WE HELPED**

Renee found Qgiv very intuitive and easy to use, for both organization staff and event participants. Without having to worry about overly technical registration systems, HSDC was able to focus on making their event a success.

“There's not much out there that we looked at that's as easy to use as Qgiv. One of our board members loves that customization is so intuitive – it's easy to change colors, to add personal stories, to add pictures. Everything is easy to do! You have the thermometer...it's all right there and it's easy to send to people!”

## TIPS AND TAKEAWAYS

- 1) Listen to your participants, take their feedback, and figure out what will work for the organization AND your supporters.
- 2) Does your organization benefit children? Gear your event TO kids so they can participate!
- 3) Don't get too big for your britches! Not every event has to be on a grand scale. That can be intimidating to potential participants.
- 4) Take a page from HSDC's book and incorporate organization awareness activities into your event. Making a game out of learning about your organization makes it fun for everyone involved!