
WAITING ROOM FOR CHILDREN PROJECT

I. Project Description

The Waiting Room For Children Project evolved several years ago in Billings, Montana where the local Yellowstone County New Lawyers Association (“YCNLA”) wanted to participate in a community project that would benefit children who were victims of crimes and had no choice but to participate in the legal process. At the time, children who were scheduled to testify in open court met with the County Attorneys in their individual offices, often surrounded by intimidating adults and a sterile office environment. YCNLA wanted to change that system and provide a comfortable, kid-friendly environment for children where they could meet with the attorneys and victim/witness coordinators and wait in a stress-free room until they were scheduled to testify. Victim/witness advocates for our local county emphasized the importance of providing a warm and comfortable environment for children to discuss issues related to child abuse and felt that a room dedicated for this purpose would enhance the court process for children, not only in their willingness to participate but also in the quality of their testimony.

YCNLA wanted to create a room for children within close proximity to the courthouse so that prosecutors and victim/witness advocates could have direct access to the children. However, in order to accomplish this goal, it was necessary for YCNLA to meet with the victim/witness coordinators for Yellowstone County and determine the space availability in the courthouse, as well as the supplies necessary to furnish the room. Next, YCNLA chose to organize a “Fun Run” in conjunction with the State Bar of Montana Annual Meeting, with the proceeds from the run to be used toward equipment and supplies for the room. Finally, when the room was approved by the county commissioners, members of YCNLA picked a weekend to paint the room, shop for supplies and toys, and decorate the waiting room.

II. Project Planning/Development

A. Identification of Need

After deciding at a monthly meeting of YCNLA that we wanted to pursue a project that would benefit children who are involved in the legal system, certain members of YCNLA met with the victim/witness coordinators employed by Yellowstone County and inquired whether this type of project would assist them in preparing children to testify in open court. The project was wholeheartedly approved, and YCNLA and the victim/witness coordinators began making a list of all the items

needed for the room, including anatomically correct dolls, board and paperback books, crayons and doodle pads, comfortable chairs and area rugs, a table for conferencing with the attorneys, a TV/VCR combo for instructional as well as recreational use, posters and bright colored paint for the walls. The room envisioned by the group represented a dramatic improvement over the sterile environment where the children met in attorneys offices and waited in a crowded hallway for their turn to testify.

B. Determination Of Project Goals And Design

1. Decisions to be made

a. Options - Project Goals

The goal of YCNLA was to provide a comfortable place for children who were victims of crimes to meet with attorneys and prepare their testimony. Another stated goal was to incorporate the efforts of the entire State Bar of Montana into this project by raising necessary funds through a “fun run” held in conjunction with the State Bar Annual Meeting.

b. Options - Project Design

YCNLA initially chose a 5K “fun run” for its fund raising event because the run required a relatively low budget and represented a low maintenance activity that would invite attorney involvement with relatively low cost to the association. However, when the number of attorneys signed up for the Annual Meeting “fun run” resulted in negligible profits for our project, YCNLA made the decision to open the “fun run” to anyone in the community and flyers were placed around town advertising the event in order to generate more participation. This tactic paid off when the number of applications increased by 200% in less than 2 weeks. By advertising in this fashion, the community became not only more aware of the need for this project, but also aware of the commitment of YCNLA to community projects. Other affiliates may wish to consider other fund-raising events to furnish their own waiting room, including a community “lock up” event, a book fair or even a pancake breakfast/pasta dinner event.

2. Decision-making process

The decision to plan and execute the “fun run” was coordinated with the State Bar Annual Meeting Planning Committee. This committee was excited that YCNLA would commit such time and resources to help children involved in the legal system and supported our efforts both in spirit as well as with financial contributions. The money donated by this organization went toward the purchase of advertising materials and a portion of t-shirt expenses for the “fun run”. The decision was also made to solicit contributions from local law firms and businesses for the remainder of the t-shirt expenses and food items necessary for the run. There were many decisions involved in the selection of toys and supplies needed to furnish the room, and YCNLA relied upon the expertise of the victim/witness coordinators to assist them in determining which toys or supplies would facilitate a caring environment and the

contribution of meaningful testimony. Many suggestions regarding toys and supplies involved safety concerns and were evaluated on that basis. Furthermore, the decision about proper supervision of the children while they were waiting to testify did not involve any increase in personnel from the county as the victim/witness coordinators were accustomed to meeting with the children and staying with them in the attorney's offices until they were called to testify. The most important decision of all involved the approval process for obtaining the space necessary to create a waiting room within the courthouse building. YCNLA approached not only the victim/witness coordinators but also the county attorneys, county bar association, county judges and county commissioners in order to obtain approval to turn an old file storage room into a waiting room for children. When we initially met with the victim/witness coordinators for the county, we proposed that the county attorney's office provide a coat closet for the use of our waiting room. We wanted a larger space but square footage in the courthouse was at a premium with several remodeling projects under way at the time. Due to the space restrictions, it took several months before the county commissioners approved our request to turn an old file room into the waiting room for children. Through the efforts of not only YCNLA, but also the county attorney's office, the local bar president, several local judges and the victim/witness coordinators, we were able to convince the county commissioners, by calling them on a weekly basis, that this waiting room was necessary to assist children through the legal process and that multiple shelves of old legal files could be stored off-site to make better use of the room.

3. Considerations in Project Planning

a. Community Resources

During the initial meeting with the county victim/witness coordinators, we agreed that YCNLA would obtain the funding necessary to transform the storage room into a waiting room and that various members of YCNLA would purchase supplies and equipment and then decorate the room. Future maintenance of the waiting room and replacement of worn or broken toys would be the responsibility of the county victim/witness program. This decision did not involve any supplemental funding from the county as they routinely purchased toys and supplies to assist the attorneys in working with children, they just simply lacked appropriate space to meet with the children or make them feel more at ease through the legal process. Additionally, YCNLA partnered with the Yellowstone Rim Runners to organize and execute the "fun run". The Rim Runners provided approximately 5 member volunteers the morning of the race. In addition, several members participated in the race and increased our attendance and enthusiasm appreciably. This partnership was beneficial in helping to spread the word about the race through their local newsletter, *Rim Runner News*, as well as helping YCNLA set up the course and prepare the timing equipment. Additionally, as mentioned before, several businesses donated food items and funds for the provision of t-shirts so that these items wouldn't decrease the profits available for the waiting room. Many of these sponsors' logos were placed on the sleeve of the t-shirt, which provided advertising for them as well.

b. Personnel

We utilized approximately 10-15 YCNLA members to execute both the “fun run” and the transformation of the waiting room. Various duties included recruiting sponsors to cover printing, publicity materials, food items for the race (bagels, juice, fruit, water, cinnamon rolls), t-shirts, awards for participants, and course set-up, registration, timing and tear-down. Additionally, when we were ready to transform the old file storage room at the courthouse into a cozy and comfortable children’s waiting room, we elicited approximately 15 YCNLA members to paint and decorate the room.

c. Revenue Availability/Fund raising

The unfortunate part of our grand master plan involved an unplanned rainstorm the day of the “fun run” which resulted in decreased race day registration. We originally planned the race in the fall to coincide with the State Bar Annual Meeting, but in retrospect we could have scheduled it for a warmer month in order to avoid bad weather. Fifty runners completed the race, resulting in approximately \$520 for use in purchasing materials for the waiting room. The remainder of our funds (approximately \$500) were donated by generous members of the State Bar Association as well as private individuals. Members of YCNLA contacted various members of the State Bar Association as well as local law firms in the Billings area to help contribute to our cause. Decorating the room during the holiday season assured that most everyone we called wanted to donate to a worthy project.

d. Other (Including equipment/physical needs)

The equipment needed for the “fun run” included a registration table, chairs, result board, refreshment table, t-shirt table, race packets (numbers, pins, course directions, sponsor advertisements), cones, timing equipment, course flags, water and juice, cups, bagels, fruit, cinnamon rolls, garbage cans, pens and awards (YCNLA chose to use Barnes and Noble gift certificates, sweatshirts and various “gag” awards).

The equipment needed for the waiting room included primer and paint, board and paperback books, crayons, note pads, a Lego table, a TV/VCR combo, educational and instructional videos, anatomically correct dolls, area rugs, comfortable chairs and a sofa, stuffed animals, posters, and a kidney-shaped conference table at kid-height for meetings with attorneys.

III. Implementation - How To Replicate Your Project

A. Timetable

Timetable for Fun Run:

SIX MONTHS OUT Order race numbers from *Runners World* magazine as they provide free numbers if you send in the race date, location, and results after the race is completed. Contact your local running organization and set a date for the race that will not conflict with other local races.

FIVE MONTHS OUT Find a volunteer who will help you design the t-shirt and the poster/flyer for your race. Call local sporting goods stores and t-shirt designers for prices for the t-shirts and award sweatshirts. Start advertising the race with other new lawyers and begin compiling a group of volunteers who will help organize and run the race.

FOUR MONTHS OUT Hold a pizza party to organize your volunteers and educate them about your project. Call your local and state bar associations and inquire about sponsor funding to help defray the cost of t-shirts and advertising. Line up sponsors for the donation of food items the day of the race. Confirm with your local running organization that race course and timing equipment will be available the day of the race. Submit your t-shirt design to the printer of your choice and make preliminary arrangements for printing.

THREE MONTHS OUT Submit your poster/flyer design to the printer of your choice and make arrangements for printing. As soon as the posters/flyers are completed, select 8-10 volunteers to place them around your community, focusing on sporting goods stores, schools, health clubs, universities, county offices and local law firms. Also, contact your local and state bar associations and arrange to have your flyer included in the next 2-3 publications of the bar association newsletters.

TWO MONTHS OUT You should start receiving applications from the runners who saw your flyer and filled out the application. Make a list of all applications received, including name, address, phone number, age group and t-shirt size. Confirm again with your local running organization that the race course and timing equipment will be available the day of the race. Set up a meeting two weeks before the race to meet with the person responsible for running the timing equipment. Contact local sponsors to donate awards such as gift certificates, sweatshirts or sporting goods.

ONE MONTH OUT Confirm with community sponsors that food donations will be available the day of the race. Collect any logos from sponsors you want to feature on your t-shirt. Three weeks before the race, make a list of the t-shirt sizes needed and submit those numbers to the t-shirt printer, allowing for approximately 25-35 extra t-shirts for late entries. Make final arrangements to have the t-shirts and award sweatshirts printed. Send out letters to the 8-10 volunteers you have lined up to help with the race and remind them of the date and location of the race, the date of the meeting with the timing personnel to discuss timing issues, and the need to make final efforts to publicize the race by placing one more round of flyers around the community.

TWO WEEKS OUT Hold a meeting with the timing personnel and discuss, step-by-step, the events that will transpire the day of the race. Set up a time to meet and set up the race course the day of the race. Make sure you have enough tables, pens, flags, traffic cones, coolers and poster board to accommodate the size of your race. Most local running organizations have all of these materials, in addition to the timing equipment, at their disposal. Contact your local bar association president and inquire

whether that person will serve as the starter for the race. Ask local grocery stores for a donation of plastic bags to use as race packets. Shop for safety pins (at least 2 for each runner), and make a flyer that thanks all of your sponsors to place in the race packet.

ONE WEEK OUT Prepare the race packets based upon the number of applications received and allow extra for race-day applications. Place the t-shirt, 2 safety pins, the race number, the sponsor flyer and any other “freebies” into each packet. Arrange the packets by t-shirt size for easier distribution.

DAY PRIOR TO EVENT Pick up food donations and arrange into boxes for easier transportation to the race. Prepare the result board by making columns for each age group and attaching a waterproof pen to the side. Send out a fax/email/phone reminder to the 8-10 volunteers who will help set up the course of the time and location for meeting to set up the course. Confirm with park personnel that the restrooms will be open and available during the day of the race.

DAY OF EVENT Meet approximately one hour before the start of the race and set up the course, the food table, the registration table, the finish area and the result board. Register runners and hand out race packets. Call runners to the starting area and let your starter start the race. During the race, set out the food and prepare the finish area. As runners cross the finish line, take their tear-off numbers and place them on the result board in order of finish. Make sure everyone is well hydrated and keep the food table stocked. Approximately 30 minutes after the completion of the race, calculate and announce the overall, age group and masters winners. Hand out the awards and hand out any “gag” awards for sportsmanship, youngest runner, oldest runner, etc. Tear down the course and remove any litter or debris from your event. Call in your race results to the local newspaper.

WEEK AFTER EVENT Send out thank you letters to sponsors and volunteers. Send in your race results to *Runners World* magazine and any local bar associations for use in their publications.

Timetable for Decoration and Painting of Waiting Room:

ONE MONTH OUT Contact your local victim/witness coordinators and make a list of supplies and equipment needed for the room. If you need to order any by mail, make arrangements to order those supplies for delivery in time to decorate the room. Call local law firms to donate money to buy books, if necessary, to supplement the money earned in the “fun run” above. Contact 8-10 volunteers to paint and decorate the room. We chose a Saturday morning so that the painters could apply primer on Friday night and then finish painting while the rest of us were shopping on Saturday morning.

ONE WEEK OUT Contact the local newspapers and television stations to inform them of your project and arrange interviews the day of the event. Send out

letters to your volunteers reminding them of the date and time for painting/decorating the room.

DAY PRIOR TO EVENT Arrange for the painting volunteers to gain access to the waiting room and apply primer to the room. Send a fax/email/phone reminder to the remaining volunteers and victim/witness coordinators of the time and location for decorating the room. Confirm with the local media that the event will take place and arrange times for interviews.

DAY OF EVENT Painters finish applying final coats of paint to the room. Send out volunteers in groups of 2-3 to shop for items needed for the waiting room. Set forth a time for everyone to meet back at the room to decorate and pose for photo opportunities with local media. When everyone returns, collect receipts and reimburse volunteers. Decorate the room, participate in photo shoots and educate the community about your project by participating in interviews with the local media.

B. Recruitment and Training of Volunteers/Personnel

YCNLA held a pizza party at a member's home to encourage participation in planning the race. Approximately 8 members showed up with their spouses or significant others so the total amount of volunteers equaled approximately 16 people. The organizer of the race asked volunteers to line up sponsors to donate food items and awards, as well as volunteer to help out on race day. When it was time to decorate the children's room, the organizer of that project solicited volunteers to paint, shop for toys and supplies, and decorate the room.

C. Publicity

Publicity included an application for the "fun run" in the State Bar Annual Meeting registration packet, flyers placed around the community, notices in the local paper and local running newsletter, segments on two local television news shows and an article highlighting our efforts in the local newspaper.

D. Day-to-Day Operations

The planning and organization for the "fun run" took approximately 6 months and the planning and organization for the waiting room took approximately 3 months.

IV. Evaluation And Impact

In evaluating the entire project, we were extremely pleased with our ultimate accomplishment, the creation of a comfortable atmosphere for children to prepare and wait to testify in open court. We have received positive feedback from both the victim/witness coordinators and the county attorneys who work with the children that these child witnesses are more relaxed when they meet with county personnel and they seem more prepared when they testify in open court. We would probably reconsider the "fun run" as a source of funding for the waiting room project as it took a tremendous

amount of planning and execution for very little profit compared to the amount of donations solicited from State Bar members, local law firms and local businesses. I think at one point during the rainy day “fun run” someone mentioned that a car wash would have been easier! YCNLA received tremendous praise from the State Bar Association as well as the local community for our efforts in helping child victims, so the end result was well worth the effort.

V. Bibliography/Other Resources

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