

Student Action Report: Dinner Auction to Raise Funds and Awareness

In 2003, our Kids Can Free the Children group at Academy of St. Joseph in Brentwood, NY, planned a dinner auction in order to raise funds and awareness. The dinner was a huge success and is now in its fourth year. However, it is a lot of work and a big commitment.

Baby Steps:

The first thing our group did was to **gauge the interest of club members**. We asked the group whether they would come to the dinner and **how many people they would bring**. Since there seemed to be a sizable amount, we decided to start planning.

Tools for donations:

When planning a large-scale fundraising event, there is one all-important tool: **Connections, connections, connections!** Some people in the group knew *DJs* who would put on the auction for free or a discounted rate. We also got a discount on our *catering hall* because a club member was a friend of the owner. Sometimes, members have parents or friends who own stores. They can donate *merchandise* to the event. *Services* are also great to auction off. For example, we auctioned off a hand-carved fishing pole, a pair of deck chairs, paintings, laser eye surgery, gym memberships, a custom-made dress, and so on. As you can see, these connections can make or break your event.

The second important tool is that people will often give you **free stuff**, if you ask nicely and come prepared. We sent our members out "grubbing" to get *merchandise* for our auction. Places like Party City or Staples will sometimes donate *supplies*, such as balloons or invitations, for the night itself. In order to get raffle baskets and other items, we went to all kinds of stores. **Always play up the free ADVERTISING!** Companies are more likely to donate if you say that their donation will be announced. You can write contributors on the raffle basket displays or print out a sheet thanking all contributors. Try to get more *items* than *gift certificates*. Both are great, but actual items fill up more space and have greater appeal. Make sure to **bring a letter with you explaining your cause and the auction** in particular. It should be a uniform official-looking letter, but you should sign it and put your own contact information on the bottom (download letter).

You can continue "grubbing" until a week or so before the event. However, try to have much of it done early so that you know there will be things to raffle. Once you get an item, someone artistic should **wrap it in basket with cellophane and ribbon** (ask craft stores for donations). You can also combine related items, even if they are from different stores. You can create themes such as 'Winter Getaway' for a basket with slippers, hot cocoa mix, books, and blanket or 'Day at the Spa' for a basket with beauty treatments.

Preparation:

There are many practical issues to consider before you start planning. After you find out **how many people might come**, you should immediately **start looking for a place to**

host your auction. If you want to save on funds, you can have the auction in your school cafeteria, auditorium, or lawn (weather permitting – consider a tent!). If you decide to go the cheaper route, you can **contact catering companies** or maybe **make the food yourself**. We rented a catering hall. Charge accordingly – people will pay more to eat in a restaurant or catered food. Our group charged \$40 a head. This gave us a profit of \$10 per person after we paid the hall. You should get all this settled a few months before the date you want to have the auction.

You will need **seed money** for deposits, decorations, and supplies not donated. Seed money can be raised through a small fund-raiser, like a movie night. The small fundraiser is also a great way to *publicize your auction and raise your club's profile* at your school.

After the date and venue are established, **print off your invitations**. Again, try to get your invitations donated. **Hand out the invites** in school and give group members extras for their families and friends. Make sure to *have an RSVP on the invitations* and tell people to whom they should make out their checks, and where to send them. People should pay before the event. Keep of a running list the RSVPs.

While all this is going on, the group should be **getting raffle items** and **getting the word out**. At our event, we also have an **educational segment** for ten minutes before dinner starts. This should be prepared and rehearsed in advance. Normally, we show a video segment and have a powerpoint presentation.

The Big Night and Afterwards:

Okay – so the big night is finally here. These are the things you will need (and should already have collected): **raffle tickets** (any store like PartyCity sells them), **table decorations** (anything from balloons to flowers – they add a lot), a **microphone** (for raffling and auctioning), and paper **gift bags** with numbers or descriptions corresponding to each raffle item. You can have your guests place their tickets in the bags of the items they want. Make sure to remind them to save half of the ticket. When it is time for the raffle, you can easily gather up the bags, read off the description of the basket, and then pull out the winning ticket.

You should have also already made a **schedule for the night** and a **list of which students are doing what jobs**. Some of the *jobs* include selling tickets, announcing raffle winners, auctioning items, escorting people to their seats, etc. You should allow about one hour to 1 ½ hours for guests to arrive and place their raffle tickets in the baskets. Then dinner. You can raffle off the items and auction the bigger items during dessert. Have the group's funniest and most out-going members do this. Allow about an hour after dessert for dancing or mingling.

Congratulations – you did it!

Some final points: Remember to **send thank you letters** to everyone who donated and came to the event, **count your money well and keep it in a safe place**, and **pay the DJ and venue** on time. Afterwards, have a meeting to thank all your hard-working members

and decide where to donate the money (if you hadn't already decided). In the past, we have donated funds to farm training and construction on a school in Kenya.

Good Luck!

- By Brittany Aubin