BEST IN THE WEST APPLICATION & WORK PLAN:

Family Services Holiday Fundraiser

Entry Information:

Name: Michelle Barile **Organization:** West Broadway BIA **Category**: Programing & Partnerships **Timeframe**: Annual/Oct-Dec

Summary:

The West Broadway BIA, in partnership with Family Services of Greater Vancouver, has created an annual holiday fundraiser to support local families in need. Holiday ornaments that name a "wish" are displayed at participating locations. Customers can provide donations by selecting, purchasing and returning a wish item, or by providing a cash contribution. The fundraiser not only raises awareness about the neighbourhood and businesses, but it also engages customers and the community to come together and make a positive impact – to give the gift of a happier and brighter holidays for families in need.

Opportunity / Need:

The West Broadway BIA (WBBIA) consists of ten tree-lined blocks of shopping, eateries and services surrounded by an eclectic mix of heritage and contemporary housing in the heart of Kitsilano. Many of the residents and merchants have been in the community for decades, including generations of families, and it is these deep roots and connections that shape the WBBIA's community-oriented approach.

While seeking input from our members about BIA initiatives, a fundraiser for local families was suggested by a retail member who also referred us to a contact at Family Services. Their staff member was a previous recipient of Family Services' donations, and wanted to give back to the organization that had a positive impact on their youth. This serendipitous introduction resulted in our ongoing partnership and annual, heart-warming Caring Neighbours holiday fundraiser with Family Services of Greater Vancouver.

The opportunity to support local families while engaging our merchants with the community in such a meaningful initiative is a wonderful fit for the WBBIA. The fundraiser aligns with our BIA slogan, "over 300 merchants and community heart", as well as our purpose statement "to enhance the prosperity of our local businesses through engaging and cooperative initiatives that connect our community".

We launched the first Family Services holiday fundraiser in November of 2015. In November 2018, for the fourth annual fundraiser, we wanted to grow the initiative and help even more families. To do this, we expanded to include cash donations online, as well as merchant family sponsorship opportunities. These convenient and accessible enhancements provided a different way to make a positive difference!

Goal / Objective:

Coming together to help families in need, while kindling the spirit of giving and compassion among local businesses and customers will allow us to:

1. **Promote the business area and members**. Increase awareness of the business area and members.
2. **Connect merchants and the community**. Provide a meaningful and authentic way for merchants to connect with locals and visitors. They can develop and/or enhance their relationship and rapport, while they come together to make a positive impact for local families.

Audience:

The main audience for the fundraiser are the patrons/shoppers who hold shared values around the importance of community. These people would likely be attracted to participate in the fundraiser, but also to make a lasting emotional connection with our area and members. Our secondary audience is WBBIA members, providing the businesses with a way to connect with their customers and help contribute to their community.

Implementation:

DEVELOPMENT:

In partnership with Family Services of Greater Vancouver (FSGV) we identified a mutually beneficial opportunity to promote the West Broadway businesses and engage the Kitsilano community while raising donations for local families. Through planning meetings with the BIA Executive Director and Family Services Counselor, a plan was developed to host a holiday fundraiser that would identify and collect specific items desired by families in need. Wish items are displayed as ornaments hanging in participating merchant locations. These personalized donation requests appeal to patrons, allowing them to choose a wish that speaks to them, and they get the positive feeling of giving back while visiting and shopping in the BIA.

COMMUNICATIONS:

The Caring Neighbours holiday fundraiser was promoted with posters in merchant windows, as well as colouring sheets that were distributed to local schools, daycares, kid-related businesses and community organizations. Fundraiser information was emailed out to our public, community and media lists and promoted at nearby events including Kitsilano Neighbourhood House's Winter Market and the Kitsilano Community Centre's Breakfast with Santa. Online promotion included the BIA website, blog post and social media as well as social media posts by Family Services and BIA merchants. In addition, we ran radio and digital ads with The Peak radio station.

PROJECT ELEMENTS:

1. **Collaboration with Family Services** – The BIA and FSGV worked together to develop the fundraiser operating plan, and coordinate the logistics and resources to make implementing the fundraiser feasible for both organizations and the participants, and ensure donations for families will be received in time for Christmas.

2. **Merchant Communications** – The BIA created merchant communications outlining the fundraiser opportunity and participant information. Family Services collected wishes from families in their program, and developed detailed instructions for receiving and tracking donations. The BIA sent a follow up/thank you to participants with a recap of the initiative's success, as well as personal thank you notes from families who received donations so that merchants could realize the impact of their contributions!

3. **Marketing Materials** – The BIA created donation ornaments, posters, counter top signage and staff name tags. In addition, the campaign was promoted through the BIA email list (600+ business contacts and 75+ community contacts), and promoted online by both the BIA and FSGV.

4. **Reallocating Wishes** – The BIA followed up with merchants throughout the campaign to see if wishes needed to be reallocated between participants. Some locations fulfilled wishes quicker than others (due to high foot traffic, customer engagement, etc.) and we redistributed donation requests appropriately as needed.

5. **Donation Collection** – WBBIA & FSGV collected items from participating merchants. FSGV family counsellors delivered items to their families in time for the holidays.

6. **Online donations** – FSGV created an online donation form so that cash donations could be made conveniently and accessibly. The cash donations were allocated to help fill wishes that had not been filled at participating merchant locations. For example, after the wish donations were collected from participating businesses, FSGV family counsellors would purchase the wish items that weren't filled, thereby helping even more families!

BUDGET:

- The Family Services Holiday Fundraiser was a cost-effective initiative for both project partners. Other than staff time, the primary cost was comprised of print materials. Marketing materials were designed in house and most of the promotions were done through the BIA and FSGV marketing and communication channels. The total budget was $2,000 (excluding staff pay). The cost breakdown includes $750 for printed donation ornaments, $100 for printed communications, $150 for marketing materials, $500 for online/website features, and $500 for The Peak FM radio and display ads.

CHALLENGES:

- **Barriers to participation – businesses:**
    - There were some businesses that wanted to participate, but due to the nature of their offerings (i.e. travel agents, consultants, etc), they did not have the same type of foot traffic as other retail locations and therefore would not be able to fulfil the wishes by relying on patrons. So there was an option for merchants and staff to sponsor a family and either fulfil the wishes between their staff, or make a cash donation to cover the cost of the donations, which would also qualify for a tax receipt. Some businesses found this a rewarding alternative to staff gifts too!

CHALLENGES, continued:

- **Barriers to participation – patrons:**
    - There were also some shoppers that wanted to partake but did not have time to shop for and return a wish item. So, there was an option for donations to include cash. This increased convenience for shoppers - in fact, many of the participating locations were banks where patrons could withdraw cash on the spot! In addition, for 2018, Family Services developed a landing page on their website so that patrons could donate anytime, and conveniently online. The cash donations could then be utilized to purchase additional gifts and fulfil even more wishes! This was a fantastic enhancement to the previous years' fundraisers, and it also helped raise more awareness about the initiative.

Results:

The fourth annual Caring Neighbours fundraiser exceeded previous year's donation totals by raising over 500 donations, and also $1,700 in cash to fill wishes for over 120 local children and their families! This brings the overall total to over 1,000 donations for over 350 families in four years. Undoubtedly, the holidays are an important retail season for businesses so it was important for us to promote the business area during this time, but also highlight an important holiday message: the importance of giving back. Shoppers, community members and merchants were grateful to be able to contribute to such a wonderful cause, and help make the holidays a happier and brighter time for families in need.

PROMOTING THE NEIGHBOURHOOD, AND CONNECTING MERCHANTS AND THE COMMUNITY:

- Online engagement and exposure – Meaningful, authentic content that came out of the fundraiser resonated with our followers and our objectives to promote the neighbourhood, and connect merchants and the community. Throughout the campaign periods, there were over 750 interactions through digital communications to our business and community contacts and online posts reaching over 3,000 people.
- Number of donations – Engagement and participation is reflected in the number of donations raised. There has been a 40% increase in donations raised since the inaugural campaign in 2015.
- Merchant participation and feedback – Members who participate enjoy it so much they continue to take part year after year! This past season, 75% were repeat participants and 25% new participants. What our merchants had to say:
    - "This is our favourite time of year. I know how it feels to be on the receiving side, and it makes me happier than ever to know I can help these families. We all look forward to gift giving every year and will continue to support Family Services in the future!" – *Sue Kurz, Travel Agent, Omega Travel*
    - "Participating in last year's Family Services fundraiser was a fulfilling and joyous experience for all of us at the Bayswater Tea Co., on both sides of the counter. My staff, myself and our many generous customers stepped up to make many Christmas wishes come true for the families in our local area that needed some help. From small gifts to larger ones, they all made a difference. This was very clear when we received a pile of hand written thank you cards and notes from the families in the new year. That was "the cherry on top!" - *Sabrina Faas, Owner, Bayswater Tea Co*

The opportunity to promote the business area while also giving back to the community is invaluable – the positive exposure travels from the street to social media and beyond!