

# Hopewell's Experience Raising Money for a Play Structure & Trees for School Yard

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Every Leaf Counts - Hopewell Yard Campaign  
November 2014 - May 2015

## **The Challenge**

All the primary yard's Ash trees we cut down in the summer of 2014. In addition, the school was aware of the fact that the play structures were on a list to be replaced within the next 1-2 years. This would mean a yard without shade and without anything to play on.

The External Environment Committee (EEC) had been working with council for several years to:

- a) come up with solutions once the trees would come down, and
- b) make sure council saved money ahead of time for this project.

Initial plans and drawings developed by the EEC over the summer and in early fall 2014 were taken to the Ottawa Carleton District School Board (OCDSB). The OCDSB told the EEC and school administration that in order for the project to be done in the summer of 2015, money for the project would have to be in place no later than March 1, 2015.

The OCDSB provided rough cost estimates based on the plans which suggested we would need \$200,000 to pay for trees and to be able to prep the play area for a future play structure, \$260,000 to include a play structure, and \$400,000 to include a turf yard.

## **Fundraising Committee**

At the November 2014 Parent Council meeting the EEC presented their findings regarding cost and scope and council agreed that a special fundraising campaign was needed to raise \$200,000 by March.

Several people at the meeting showed interest and the fundraising committee was formed, which created different roles within the committee, such as:

- Chair
- Events (i.e. an event at House of TARG, Cheer for Shade, Shop for Shade, Starbucks events)
- communications / branding / creative
- grants
- CHIMP (organizing the fundraising site)
- Reaching out to the business community
- leaf hanging ceremonies
- Cheer for Shade (OSEG event)
- Reaching out to alumni
- community engagement
- organizing the Dance-a-Thon
- EEC liaison

## **Goal**

At the first fundraising committee meeting the members agreed on two things: 1) the committee was only going to be focussed on raising fund (the EEC would be in charge of yard related issues) and 2) our goal was going to be to raise \$200,000 by March 1 2015 so that the construction work could be done in the summer of 2015.

One of the success factors for the committee was that we had two members who were also on the Yard Committee as well as several Parent Council members. Liaising between committees and council proved to be an important aspect of planning and execution.

## **Brand**

One of the first decisions the committee made was that we should try to create a recognizable brand. Once we agreed on the slogan "Every Leaf Counts" we asked our graphic designer to create the "brand". Her work was instrumental to the campaign. After a slow start in December, the recognisability of the logo, artwork, and campaign as a whole started paying off and we saw huge spikes in donations.

## **Planning & Communications**

With a professional fundraiser on the committee we were able to create a solid launch plan. We made the decision to launch on December 2 2014 as that was officially Giving Tuesday. Several members of the committee created special lyrics to a couple of winter classics which a group of children and parents performed in the yard before drop-off. Several media outlets were invited and the Ottawa Citizen filmed and posted our performance.

We also agreed to send out an electronic newsletter once a week through the school's email system to update parents. With the help of Ryan, we made sure all of our communications emphasized a positive, 'we can do it' tone.

The first, introductory newsletter was also printed and distributed through the kids' note-totes. One additional note-tote drop went out towards the end of the campaign.

Weekly - and towards the end of the campaign bi-weekly - updates proved very effective and important for the campaign. Every time we sent out an electronic newsletter with a link to the donations page a fresh stream of donations would come in.

The ELC committee also set up a Facebook page and a Twitter account. The Facebook page was updated frequently and, apart from the direct emails to parent, served as our primary means of communication about the campaign.

## **CHIMP**

To facilitate donations, our fundraiser presented the committee with several online donations option. The committee decided to go with chimp.net for several reasons. The fees for Chimp proved to be a lot lower than fees for similar service providers. Chimp is also a Canadian company, which was able to provide tax receipts directly through the website.

An additional benefit of Chimp is that it allows organizations to create “Giving Groups”, which allows individual donors to create their own groups and fundraising targets.

### **Target segments**

We identified 4 target segments for our campaign: parents of Hopewell children, Alumni (and parents of Alumni), the business community, and the community at large.

We agreed to create different strategies for the different target segments and two to three people agreed to work on each of them.

Parents: our main focus was repeated communication about our goals, needs, etc by sending out weekly updates. We also engaged the children by putting up donations leaves in the atrium, visible to everyone who comes through the school.

Business Community: We created a form letter and a “before and after” document to send/show to our business contacts. The majority of small, local businesses in the community were unable to help financially, but helped out through donations to our main fundraising event (see below).

Alumni: reaching the alumni community proved both very difficult and ultimately rather ineffective.

Community: at the beginning of the campaign we approach both the OSCAR and OSCA to see if we could run articles about our campaign in the OSCAR as well as having OSCA post information to their website. The committee wrote a different article every month, focussing on different aspects of the campaign. These articles were published in the OSCAR, Mainstreeter, and we also received a feature in the EMC.

This strategy proved to be highly effective as it informed the entire community about our campaign and further solidified our “brand”.

### **Everyday Working of the Committee**

At the start of the campaign we tried to meet in person once, sometimes twice a week. Although these early meetings were highly effective to get started and to create our identity, they proved to be very ineffective and time consuming once the campaign got underway.

Instead the committee seemed to “splinter” off into smaller sub-groups, with each group in charge of a very specific aspect of the campaign.

These smaller “working groups” worked well in part because the chair of the committee was able to work on the campaign almost full time and because we were able to form a “core” team of 2-3 committee members to oversee strategic decisions.

### **Fundraising Events**

Several ideas of fundraising events were discussed and at the very beginning of the campaign we agreed we were only going to organize events if they were going to raise a significant amount of money. If people in the community wanted to organize smaller events (e.g. bottle drives, bake sales, etc.) then we would facilitate, but not manage it ourselves.

Ultimately we agreed to organize two main fundraising events, one for parents and one for the kids.

For the parents we decided to organize a Trivia Night/Auction event. We were able to secure House of TARG as our venue. No rent was paid, but House of TARG kept the concessions. The event raised \$20,000 through three sources: 1) ticket sales (~\$5k), 2) a live and silent auction (~\$10k), and 3) a matching donation by Scotiabank (\$5k).

Despite the tremendous success of the event, the silent and live auction component proved incredibly time consuming. For future consideration we would likely suggest to NOT have a silent auction, but only create roughly 10 live-auction packages.

The children's Dance-a-Thon was mainly organized by the school. Staff took care of all the scheduling, hiring of the DJ, running the event itself, and dealing with the money. The ELC committee took care of all communications, created and distributed the pledge forms, and secured all the event prizes for the kids. The Dance-a-Thon raised \$42,000. Compared to the parent event, this was a much easier event to organize, with a much higher return.

The success of the Dance-a-Thon can be largely attributed to two factors:

- a) we had one committee member who was fully responsible for the entire event, including securing prizes
- b) teachers were fully behind this event. Teachers became our biggest advocates towards the kids and their enthusiasm was a large factor in the success of the event.

### **Shop for Shade, Sheer for Shade, etc.**

Several smaller events were also organized by committee members. Several local businesses indicated that they could not give us money directly, but that if we promoted a specific day for shopping at their location we would receive a percentage of sales from that day (typically 10%). Several businesses hosted a version of this, including Mrs. Tiggy Winkles, Kaleidoscope Books, Boomerang, the Hair Republic, and Cedars (who gave us 5% of sales for the whole month of February).

Through our contacts with OSEG we were able to create a deal for parents where we could sell ticket vouchers for a 67s and a Fury game. For each 67 voucher we sold we had to pay OSEG \$7 and for each Fury ticket we had to pay OSEG \$8. We decided to sell the vouchers for \$15, meaning we received roughly 50% of all sales. While slightly labour intensive to distribute the tickets, this was a very successful initiative (~\$4000) and one that can easily be repeated year-after-year.

In speaking with the Mayfair it became clear that they too would not be able to donate money directly to our campaign. But instead they offered us free use of the theatre for the February PD day. We sold tickets for this private event through the school and made \$1700.

### **Political Outreach**

Alongside all the fundraising work the committee also made sure to reach out to all relevant levels of government, including the OCDSB, our counsellor, MPP, and school board trustee. While this did not lead to any additional grants or funds, we did receive a lot of support in getting the word out.

### **Grants**

The committee applied for several grants, with varying success.

Toyota Evergreen - applied for \$3,500 received \$1,500

TD Friends of the Environment - applied for \$20,000 received \$3,110

In a follow up discussion with TD it became clear that we would have had much greater success if we had applied at different times of the year. They have 4 intake dates a year. Summer and fall intake dates don't receive anywhere near as many requests as winter and spring when everyone is looking ahead to summer construction/planting. We had no choice given the timing of our plans but future projects will want to bear that in mind.

Tree Canada - applied for \$3000 received nothing to date

City of Ottawa Minor Capital Grant - Applied for \$7500 with a \$7500 matching grant from OSCA and we received the total amount (\$15000).

Majesta Trees of Knowledge - vied for a \$20,000 grand prize for an outdoor classroom. Came in 6th and received \$1,000.

Grant applications were relatively effective and successful, with the exception of the Majesta competition. The month long voting competition took a lot of time and energy with very little result.

It was an incredible amount of work but we have the full support and dedication of our school's administration team so they helped whenever possible to make things happen. We couldn't have done it without constant communication and cooperation with the school. The whole school community was fully engaged and participated in all events. It remained a very positive experience for all rather than parents feeling like they are being harassed from all sides.