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Volunteer Effectiveness on Nonprofit Organizations

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Abstract

When a parent gets told their child has cancer it is a life changing and devastating moment. Although there are many factors that cause pediatric cancer, one thing remains constant. Families need to feel supported during these difficult times as their main priority is being with their child. Jacob's Heart Children's Cancer Support Services is a nonprofit organization in California that operates on donations, grants, staff and volunteer support to alleviate burdens accompanied by a pediatric cancer diagnosis. Volunteers are vital for nonprofit organizations as they provide dedication to fulfill the organization's mission. Surveys were conducted to measure the effectiveness of the volunteer program at Jacob's Heart. It was predicted to have over 20 surveys filled out via Google form by volunteers. The findings from this project indicate that Jacob's Heart should establish clear communication, provide orientation, and acknowledge volunteers to ensure engagement and encourage a strong volunteer base.

Keywords: Pediatric cancer, nonprofit, volunteer, survey, California

Agency & Communities Served

Jacob's Heart Children's Cancer Support Services is a nonprofit organization located in Watsonville, California. The non-profit was founded by Lori Butterworth in 1998 after witnessing the struggles Jacob Jude's mom faced while he battled cancer. Lori knew that children with cancer needed strong, empowered families to advocate for their care (n.d). The purpose and mission of Jacob's Heart is to improve the quality of life for children with cancer by supporting their families in the challenges they face (Mihelic, n.d). There are currently 311 families that receive services at Jacob's Heart. Jacob's Heart's current demographic being served are those in 4 counties including Santa Cruz, Monterey, San Benito, and South Santa Clara, with hope to continue to expand. Jacob's Heart offers financial, emotional, and practical support to families with a teen or child facing cancer. The services provided by Jacob's Heart are provided through the staff, donors and most importantly volunteers.

Problem Model Background and Literature Review

Problem Statement: Pediatric cancer has an outsized effect on families

Contributing Factors

One's environment can play a significant role in a child's susceptibility to childhood cancer. Studies have shown that children living in proximity to agriculture in California have a higher exposure in developing cancer at a young age. A study conducted at the University of California, Los Angeles and other universities in Southern California, published in the year 2020 and 2021, linked the significant findings between several childhood cancers and prenatal residential proximity to the application of 13 agricultural pesticides (Weller, 2021). The 13

agricultural pesticides are known as “The Toxic 13”. The toxic 13 require a permit for use which is usually not done, 12 pesticides are still registered for use in California. In other countries, however, many pesticides are restricted or banned (Weller, 2021). The researchers found, “a combined 13 individual pesticides that displayed a statistically significant increase in the rates of certain childhood cancers, at 95% confidence levels for both single- and multiple-pesticide tests performed” (Weller, 2021). The researchers examined the percent increase in cancer-causing pesticide use in the 1990s vs 2010 in California. UCLA and Southern California researchers found that in Monterey County there was an 80.2% increase while in Santa Cruz County there was a 109.1% increase (Weller, 2021). It is evident that pesticides are causing cancer in areas where agriculture is present. According to the county of Monterey, Monterey County is the third largest agricultural county in California and Agriculture supplies the majority of jobs in the county (*Economy And Workforce*, 2009). Santa Cruz accounts for 36% of all organic production in the United States and in Santa Cruz County (Walker, n.d.). There will not be a decrease in cancer-causing pesticides in California until Toxic 13 is banned from agricultural use in California.

Socioeconomic also plays a role in childhood cancer. According to an article on the Feasibility of Systemic Poverty Screening in Pediatric Oncology Referral Center, “Over 40% of children in the United States live in “poor, near poor, or low income” households with an ever-growing literature base demonstrating the negative effects of poverty on child health” (Zheng et al., 2018). It is evident that children who live in poverty are more susceptible to pediatric cancer due to the lack of resources available. According to Poverty and Survival in Childhood Cancer: A Framework to Move Towards Systemic Change, “Of 16,000 children diagnosed with cancer annually, 20% live in poverty” (Wolfson, 2020). In 2022, California had a

9.0% for children in poverty (*Children in Poverty - California Poverty Measure*, n.d.). Children living in poverty often are not getting the proper preventive care due to lack of nearby health facilities, finances, and transportation. In the article on the Effects of Poverty on Child Health and Development, poor children experience higher morbidity rates as a result of two factors (Aber, n.d.). It is evident that poverty can be a factor in childhood cancer.

Consequence

Cancer can be a financial hardship for many families upon being diagnosed and through their treatment. When a parent finds out their child has cancer it can be hard for them to still prioritize work, as a result, they face financial struggles. According to an Assessment of Financial Burden as a Standard of Care in Pediatric Oncology, “family financial hardship as a consequence of childhood cancer treatment has been documented over the past three decades (Pellertier, 2015). The nearest children's hospital in Monterey County, Lucile Packard Children’s Hospital Stanford, is roughly 2 hours away. Out-of-pocket expenses can be out of a parent's means and can result in not being able to take their child to appointments. The article also explains that travel is not the only hardship a family can face. Accommodation, childcare, food, gifts, and treats were also identified as significant sources of financial burden. Many children are also immunocompromised, which makes it difficult for their families to go grocery shopping safely. According to the article, COVID-19 in Children Cancer, “Children with cancer experience significant risk from COVID-19 pandemic” (Khan,2020). Jacob’s Heart provides financial assistance to families as they undergo treatment. The family can use the money over the course of the year for rent, bills, and insurance payments. Cancer patients typically need specialized treatment. According to Geographic Access to Pediatric Cancer Care in the US, those

teams are usually found in highly specialized care centers, such as academic centers, children's hospitals, and cancer centers, which are often located in urban areas. This locality creates challenges for families residing in rural or remote areas" (Liu, 2019). Through the program Heart on Wheels, a program offered at Jacob's Heart, families can request door-to-door rides to children's specialty care appointments to Lucile Packard Children's Hospital Stanford. Jacob's Heart was able to provide 504 door-to-door rides for families to their appointments in 2022 (Pinwheel Creative LLC, 2022). Groceries and Goods can also be a burden for families to obtain. In 2022 Jacob's Heart provided 101 families with fresh groceries (Pinwheel Creative LLC, 2022). Jacob's Heart is continuing to expand into more counties as more children in California are being diagnosed with cancer.

It can be hard for a child and their family to find out the child has cancer. Many children with cancer can end up experiencing relapse even as a survivor. According to research on the psychological impact of childhood cancer, "Children with cancer and survivors of childhood cancer may experience severe anxiety, inhibited and withdrawn behavior, behavior problems, excessive somatic complaints, intense stress, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), academic difficulties and surrounding frustration, peer relationship difficulties, and worries about the future in relation to career and relationships" (Toro, n.d.). Jacob's Heart believes "Children with cancer and their families need support to build confidence and resilience in the face of one of life's greatest challenges". The organization offers therapy, coaching, and case management. Families complete an assessment in order for staff to be able to assist in finding resources to meet their needs. There is also bereavement support, which meets on a quarterly basis. There is also a program called Forever Sibling which is targeted to support the brother and sister.. Once a

year bereavement families attend a retreat called Forever Loved, at the event they talk to other parents/ siblings who have lost a child to cancer. Jacob’s Heart provided 11,363 hours of counseling and 1,875 grief support hours in 2022 (Pinwheel Creative LLC, 2022).

Contributing Factors	Problem	Consequences
Factor 1: Environment	One sentence problem definition: Pediatric cancer has an outsized effect on families	Consequence 1: Financial/Practical burden on families
Factor 2: Poverty		Consequence 2: Mental health is affected

Project Description

The purpose of the project was to survey the volunteers at Jacob’s Heart to better identify improvements the organization should make in order to better the volunteer program. The project was conducted by sending out surveys to volunteers via email attached to the volunteer newsletter. Volunteers filled out the survey via Google form, this allowed for responses to be transferred to a Google spreadsheet to be reviewed and shared with staff. Survey responses were recorded anonymously, to encourage transparency. When it was noticed that volunteers were not filling out the survey a QR code was printed to be displayed on site. When volunteers came in they were encouraged to fill out the survey. The survey contained a variety of questions like rating and short response, each question curated to measure how effective the volunteers found

the programs and the resources provided by Jacob's Heart. The volunteers had approximately 1 month to fill out the survey.

Project Justification

Although there is no cure for cancer yet, there are resources out there that can help families out during these times. Many families during these times do not have any type of support. Nonprofits like Jacob's Heart rely on volunteers to help fulfill their mission statement and values. Learning more about how volunteers feel and giving them a voice is important in the improvements of nonprofits. The project will have a positive impact on the agency and the community they serve as it will measure how the volunteer programs can improve. Volunteers are a key essential at nonprofits since they provide their time and advocate for the nonprofit. At the end of the project, the agency gained a better understanding of how to improve its volunteer program. This will increase volunteer retention as there will be a clear understanding of what volunteers feel should be improved in the program. This project will not only benefit Jacob's Heart as their volunteer program will improve but also outreach. Volunteers will feel confident in spreading Jacob's Heart mission in their communities and encourage more community members to get involved.

Implementation Process

The project took place during the months of October and November 2023. In order for the implementation of the process to begin information was gathered on the volunteer program at the agency. This allowed for there to be a clear understanding of what was expected from volunteers as well as the volunteer coordinator. Surveys with relevant questions were created on

a Google form. The Google form was sent out to all volunteers through the volunteer newsletter and a QR code was advertised at the agency. Once questions were drafted, feedback was received from the mentor. Once the mentor looked over the questions it was sent to be reviewed by the volunteer coordinator. Feedback from the volunteer coordinator was received in the beginning of October.

Questionnaire was finalized in October, input from the mentor and volunteer coordinator were taken in consideration. The survey was sent out mid October. To ensure there is participation, an Instagram story was posted to remind volunteers to fill out the survey. The last day volunteers were able to fill out the survey was November 20, 2023.

The survey responses were evaluated and a Google spreadsheet was created to organize the data. The data was evaluated by the intern, and a clear understanding of suggestions to provide to the mentor and volunteer coordinator were made. A meeting was held to give the volunteer coordinator and mentor feedback on the significant findings. A Thank you message was added to the last volunteer newsletter from 2023 to express gratitude for filling out the survey.

Assessment Plan & Expected Outcomes

The assessment plan for the capstone project was to send surveys to volunteers at Jacob's Heart. The survey was sent out to volunteers via email. The survey was linked to the volunteer newsletter so they can be accessed by all volunteers. Volunteers were able to fill out the 6-question survey anonymously. The questions range from short answers to rating programs and their experience on a scale from 1-5. The questions were created with key personnel to assess the volunteer agency to better serve the community. The volunteers had approximately 1 month to

fill out the survey. It was expected to have over 20 volunteers fill out the survey. Ensuring that there are enough surveys is important as it will help obtain better data.

The responses were transferred to a google sheet and evaluated. The survey responses brought to light new implementations that can be made to better the program. The goal of the survey is to increase volunteer retention and have a clear understanding of what volunteers feel should be improved in the program.

The Volunteer Coordinator, mentor, and the Executive Director were presented with the findings on November 29, 2023. The meeting involved a discussion on improvements that should be made to the volunteer program. Data from previous years was taken into consideration. Comparing present findings to past year can help identify improvements that have been made over the year that should continue.

The overall expected outcome was to receive feedback from volunteers to allow them to express what changes they feel should be made. It is expected to see changes in the volunteer program to better satisfy the volunteer's needs. The volunteer coordinator will also take into consideration adding the Google form to the volunteer newsletter at least every year. In doing so improvements can be made to the volunteer program every year.

Project Results

After reviewing the feedback made by the volunteers, there was a clear understanding of improvements that should be made to the program. Although there was a low amount of surveys completed, 9 surveys filled out, relevant information was still able to be obtained. It can be concluded, since there were a few volunteers who participated in filling out the survey, many have changed their email address or do not read the volunteer newsletter.

As shown in figure 2, of those who filled out the survey 44.4% volunteer once or twice a week, 33.3% volunteer once a week, and 22.2% volunteer more than once a week. It was found in figure 3 that 55.6% attend orientation while 44.4% did not attend. All responders rated their experience as volunteers. In figure 4 it can be seen that all who responded rated their experience a 5 meaning excellent. Volunteers were asked to check the type of volunteer work they have done. Figure 5 breaks down what most volunteers are involved in. It was noticed that many are involved in grocery packing 88.9%, grocery bag decorating 44.4% and grocery delivery 33.3%.

Volunteers rated their satisfaction with all the programs offered at Jacob's Heart. It is shown in figure 6 that the most common rating was a 5 meaning excellent or the volunteer had not done that type of work yet. It was asked if volunteers had any suggestions or other programs they would like to see. To this question many expressed they would like to see volunteers get recognized for their work and expressed wanting to see more outreach days at Jacob's Heart. In this section others also took the time to thank the staff.

As the surveys were sent via email attached to the volunteers newsletter it would be that many do not read the newsletter or have changed their email address since signing up. When it was noticed that there was a low number of responses it was advised to print out a QR code of the survey to be displayed at the front desk at the agency. This allowed for those who came in person to respond to the survey. It can be led to believe that many probably do not read the newsletter or do not come in person as frequently. The amount of responses did not accurately reflect how many volunteers are currently active this year at Jaocb's Heart. Further investigation was collaborated with the volunteer coordinator to determine if there was an increase in hours by volunteers. It was found that from 2022 to 2023 by the third quarter, January to September, there was an increase of 691 hours. Although it is important to know how many volunteer hours are

being completed by all volunteers, it is also important to measure how many active volunteers are returning every month.

As Jacob's Heart transitions to a new volunteer coordinator these findings will be helpful in order to strengthen the volunteer program. The results allowed for there to be a clear understanding of recommendations that should be made to strengthen the volunteers base at the agency.

Conclusion & Recommendations

Volunteers are a backbone for nonprofits as they allow for the agency to be able to maximize the impact of every donation. Keeping volunteers engaged is important as it will ensure their chances of wanting to come back and volunteer. This all starts with the volunteer orientation. Orientation is important as it helps the volunteer learn more about the nonprofit along with the programs offered. Not only does it allow volunteers to gain knowledge of the agency, but it also creates a relationship between the volunteer and the coordinator.

The agency should have clear communication with their volunteers. It is important at orientation to learn the volunteers' motive. Learning the volunteers' motive can help determine what task they can be assigned to. Many volunteers upon filling out the volunteer application indicate that they are being required to complete a certain amount of hours by a third party. Distinguishing those who will be volunteering for a short term compared to those who will be there long term can prevent work being assigned and not being completed. The agency should take into consideration adding a survey at the end of each year to continue to strengthen the program. This allows volunteers the space to share how they feel and make their own recommendations. The survey asked volunteers if they would recommend a friend, however I feel this question did not provide relevant information as it was vague. It is recommended to

change the question to read “What influences your decision to stay engaged as a volunteer”.

Volunteers should also be given the opportunity every year to update their email address.

Lastly, creating a stewardship for volunteers will ensure volunteer retention. Just as donors like to receive thank you notes for their donations, volunteers also expressed wanting to be recognized. Continuing “Volunteer of the Month” is suggested as it highlights volunteers on the Instagram page. This allows for acknowledgement for their contributions to the organization. It can also be added that volunteers must complete a certain amount of volunteer hours to be considered for volunteer of the month. It is highly encouraged to find a software like “Neon One” to track volunteer hours and assign tasks to volunteers. At the end of the year volunteers should be invited to a potluck held at the agency. This will allow for the executive board director and staff to express their gratitude towards volunteers.

Overall the recommendations expressed should be taken in consideration as it will help keep volunteers engaged.

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Appendix A

Figure 1
Volunteer Program Survey

Volunteer Program Survey

brianna@jacobsheart.org [Switch account](#)
Not shared

* Indicates required question

Untitled Section

How often do you volunteer at Jacob's Heart? *

More than once a week
 Once a week
 Once or twice a week
 Once a month
 A few times a month
 Other: _____

Did you attend a volunteer orientation? *

Choose

How would you rate your experience as a Jacob's Heart volunteer? *

1 2 3 4 5
Poor ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ Excellent

What volunteer work have you done? (Check all that apply) *

Grocery Packing
 Grocery Delivery
 Grocery bag decorating
 Kid's Card
 Office Work
 Events
 Other: _____

How satisfied are you with the following program? *
1 = Very dissatisfied 5 = Very satisfied

	1	2	3	4	5	Haven't done this type of volunteer work
Grocery Packing	<input type="radio"/>					
Grocery Delivery	<input type="radio"/>					
Grocery bag decorating	<input type="radio"/>					
Kid's Cards	<input type="radio"/>					
Office Work	<input type="radio"/>					
Events	<input type="radio"/>					

Is there any volunteer work you would like to see at Jacob's Heart? *

Your answer _____

Would you recommend a friend to volunteer at Jacob's Heart? *

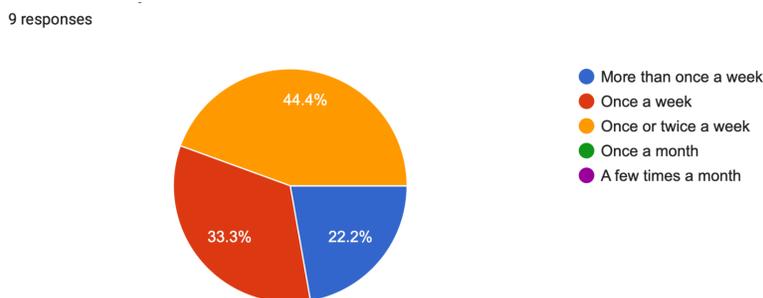
Choose

Any additional comments or suggestions you have regarding the volunteer program? *

Your answer _____

Note. Survey that was sent out to measure the effectiveness of the volunteer program.

Figure 2
How often do you volunteer at Jacob's Heart?

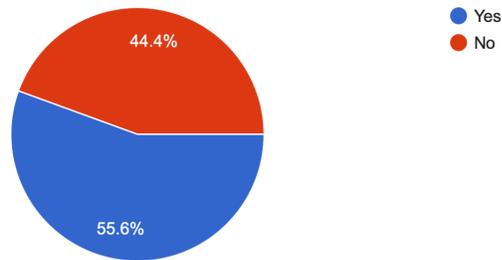


Note. Once or twice a week, once a week, and more than once a week is the average amount of time volunteers come to volunteer at the agency.

Figure 3

Did you attend a volunteer orientation?

9 responses

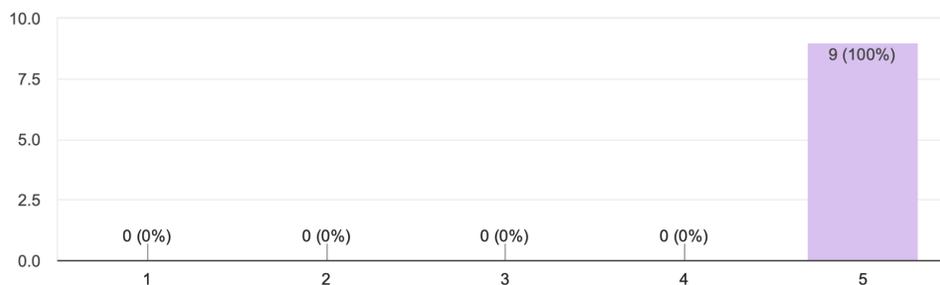


Note. A visual representation of how many attended an orientation upon signing up to volunteer.

Figure 4

How would you rate your experience as a Jacob’s Heart volunteer?

9 responses

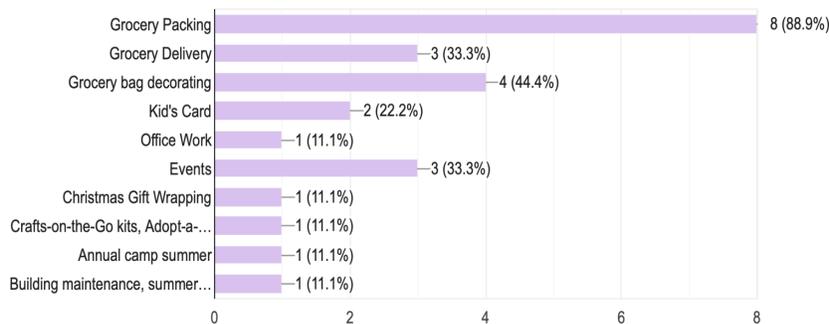


Note. Scale was set from 1-5, 1 meaning poor and 5 meaning excellent.

Figure 5

What type of volunteer work have you done? (check all that apply)

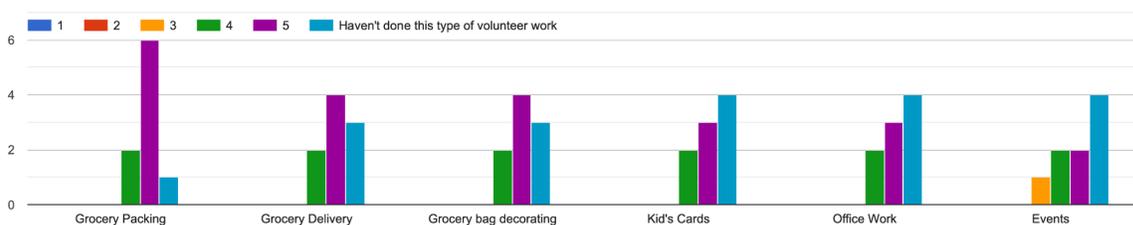
9 responses



Note. A clear understanding of the type of volunteer work that is being done by volunteers.

Figure 6

How satisfied are you with the following programs?



Note. Scale was set from 1-5, 1 meaning poor and 5 meaning excellent. An option was added for those to indicate if they have not done the type of volunteer work.

Table 1

Process Implementation Process

Activities	Timeline/Deadlines	Materials/ Services needed	Supporting Staff	Deliverables
Think of questions to include on surveys	September 14, 2023	NA	Mentor/ Volunteer Coordinator	BrainStorming
Talk with volunteer coordinator	September 20, 2023	Need to know when they send out weekly newsletters	Volunteer Coordinator/ Mentor	Meeting
Create surveys	September 22, 2023	Create surveys so mentor can look over questions	Volunteer Coordinator/ Mentor	Surveys
Turn in survey	Beginning of October 2023	Get surveys to volunteer coordinator	Volunteer Coordinator	Email
Send out Survey	By October 2023	Get surveys on the newsletter	Volunteer Coordinator	Email
Check in on volunteers	Mid October 2023	NA	Volunteer Coordinator	Through google form responses
Collect all surveys	Mid November 2023	Obtain responses from google form	NA	Through google form responses
Evaluate surveys	Mid November 2023	Survey responses	NA	NA

Give Jacob's Heart feedback on what I found	End of November 2023	Survey evaluation	Volunteer coordinator, Mentor, and executive board director	Meeting
Send out a thank you note to volunteers through newsletter	December 2023	Short Thank you note	Volunteer coordinator, Mentor	Email