

## FAMILY FUN FESTIVAL FamiliesFORWARD Cincinnati, Ohio

In 1997, parents at Hays Elementary School requested that FamiliesFORWARD lead the development of a family carnival. The elementary school is located in the middle of a housing project and many of the parents felt that the community did not have enough positive events for families and children. The parents believed the school would be an excellent place to host a family carnival. At about the same time, a professional event planner contacted FamiliesFORWARD hoping to volunteer for the agency. A committee of parents, school staff, community representatives, agency staff, and volunteers met with the event planner and began planning the first FamiliesFORWARD Family Fun Festival. Specifically, the Family Fun Festival addressed three goals: to educate family members about services in the school and community; to encourage positive parent/child interaction; and to increase parent involvement and interest in school activities. The event was so successful that the agency has continued this practice for six years.

To plan the festival, the committee tried to meet the goals of the parents, the school, and the agency. Parents wanted a fun and free event that would encourage all of the families in the housing project to come to the school. School staff wanted to educate parents about various school programs such as the parent teacher organization, and to en-

courage parents to promote learning at home. FamiliesFORWARD wanted families to learn about available services for nutrition, first aid, bicycle safety, fire prevention, and more. To meet these goals, the committee decided to plan a carnival with 30 booths, each one sponsored by a different group or agency, and each one containing a fun, interactive game for children and parents.

The Family Fun Festival occurred late in August, right before the start of school. The school district provided free school supplies for students and included information about upcoming school events. Many agencies and services responded to the invitation to host a booth at the Family Fun Festival. For example, the local chapter of The Red Cross, Children's Hospital, the fire department, the Nutrition Council and many other groups hosted booths. The volunteer event planner helped each agency to plan a game, and donate many of the items (basketball games, ring toss games, etc.) that would make the booths more interesting to children. The Nutrition Council turned a traditional game of ring toss into a food group game where children were challenged to identify foods in each food group to win prizes.

A cakewalk was also planned, for which local agencies and companies provided a cake designed with a message for families and children. For example, the fire depart-

ment provided smoke detector cakes and an insurance company provided cakes with a “wear your seatbelt” message. To win the cakes, families played a game similar to musical chairs where each participant walked in a circle to music until the music stopped. When the music stopped, each participant stepped on a number and a number was drawn from a bowl. The winning number chose a cake to take home to their family. One hundred cakes were distributed at the cakewalk.

The planning committee was challenged to implement this event with no funding. However, this did not become a major obstacle because the committee successfully obtained many donations. A local grocery store donated bottled water and a local beverage manufacturer donated other drinks. Stores and restaurants donated gift certificates as prizes for games. One of the area’s insurance companies helped out by sponsoring food so that families could enjoy hot dogs and hamburgers during the festival. Many companies and local vendors were willing to donate to an educational and fun event for families. The cost of implementing the Family Fun Festival was approximately \$2,500.

Volunteers helped to make the Family Fun Festival a successful and cost-effective event. Parents recruited other parents. Students shared their input with the planning committee. Community members, company employees, and school staff volunteered to work the event. In all, more than 75 volunteers agreed to set up booths, serve food, supervise games, and clean up after the event.

Over 1000 parents and children participated in the event. Families who attended the Family Fun Festival were asked to complete a survey as part of the evaluation of FamiliesFORWARD conducted by Children’s Hospital in Cincinnati. Parents reported that they learned about services, had fun with their children, and felt more connected to their community. Many parents signed up for programs and services that would benefit their families.

The Family Fun Festival has been an innovative way to inform families about community services and engage them in partnership with their school while having a great time at an event. Each year more partners are solicited to participate in the event so that the festival remains innovative, educational, and fun.

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