

COMMUNITY RELATIONS IN SPORTS & ENTERTAINMENT

THE CHICAGO CUBS “CUBS CARE” PROGRAM

BACKGROUND

Cubs Care connects with its community. It couldn't be any other way, considering the bond that exists between the team and the city of Chicago. The team and its players are woven into the fabric of the North Side of “the windy city.” The neighborhood surrounding Wrigley Field is known as “Wrigleyville,” owing as much to the mutual affection between team and fans as to the name of the famous ballpark at its center.

Thousands of non-profit organizations in the Greater Chicago area benefit from the funds and merchandise provided by the team, its players, the fans, and outside contributions. Cubs Care provides “financial support for youth sports, children with special needs, victims of domestic violence, and social service agencies in the community.” Established in 1991, the charity has distributed over \$12 million and has recently averaged more than \$1 million a year.

Funds come from a variety of activities. One of the most popular is the Cubs Convention, an off-season opportunity for fans to interact with players, team management, and broadcasters. To participate, fans must pay an admission fee. The three day event provides attendees with a chance to discuss plans for the upcoming season, have photos taken with their favorite players, and get autographs. In-season events include Meet the Team, Have a Ball, where those donating to Cubs Care can meet with players and receive autographed baseballs and Hey Dad, Wanna Have a Catch, which allows youngsters to play catch in the outfield with parents, run the bases, and spend time touring the playing field. Participants also receive baseballs, T-shirts, and can eat lunch in the Friendly Confines Café.

Players' wives also help by participating in food drives, writing and editing books (Wrigley Field, A to Z is one recent publication), and organizing charity events.

Much effort goes into promoting youth baseball in Chicago. Cubs Care grants not only support Little League and other youth programs, but also have been used to rehabilitate and upgrade several fields. The fund has partnered with local agencies to refurbish and build four diamonds, named “Legends Fields” in honor of former Cubs players, at Hamlin Park. A \$500,000 donation, made in partnership with the Chicago Park District, the City of Chicago, and the Thillens family, also helped revive Thillens Stadium, a historic local field first opened in 1938.

QUESTIONS

1. What role does the team's management of Cubs Care play in its overall marketing strategy?
2. Can you think of other fund raising activities that would be consistent with the team's approach to its participation in Cubs Care?
3. Why are community relations programs important to sports and entertainment organizations? Are they also important to athletes and celebrities? Why or why not?
4. Would a program similar to Cubs Care work as well in another city or in another sport where the fans are less passionate about the team, where the team hasn't been around as long, or where the ties between team and community are not as strong? Why or why not?