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Project Description

Please provide your narrative statement in the space provided below:

Abstract

The Milwaukee Fire Education Center's Survive Alive House (Survive Alive House) is a non-profit organization that was created in 1992 as a cooperative venture between the Milwaukee Fire Department (MFD), Milwaukee Public Schools (MPS) and the Milwaukee Safety Commission to provide fire safety education to children, adults and school systems in the Milwaukee metropolitan area. Located at 2059 S. 20th Street in Milwaukee, this facility has provided hands-on practical experiences and education to more than 160,000 area children and community members over the past decade.

The programs that are offered at the Survive Alive House are designed for children between the ages of 7 and 12 years old (2nd & 5th grades). The children and adults who visit the Survive Alive House or our mobile units mirror the demographics of Milwaukee population. Persons of every race, creed, color and economic background have been served by our facility. In 2002, the Survive Alive House was open for 184 days and taught 345 programs to 14,871 students and 1,307 adults. Our mobile units operated from May through October and reached 27,080 people and taught 99 programs. For the second year in a row Milwaukee did not have a fire fatality in our target age group (7-12 year olds).

Organization Information

In its inception the project was developed through the commitment and contributions of several area partners including businesses, local politicians, governmental agencies and private individuals - all of whom donated time, money and equipment to see this vitally needed program come to fruition.

The mission of the Survive Alive House is to educate school-aged children about fire safety and teach them the skills that they will need not only to prevent fires, but also how to "stay alive" during an actual fire. The Survive Alive House does much more than provide information from classroom texts, lectures and videos - it gives children an opportunity to get "hands-on" experience in escaping a fire.

The programs that are offered at the Survive Alive House are designed for children between the ages of 7 and 12 years old. In the 10 years that the Survive Alive House has been operating we have provided more than 160,000 children and adults from Milwaukee with fire education and safety training. The children and adults who visit the Survive Alive House or our mobile units mirror the demographics of Milwaukee population. Persons of every race, creed, color and economic background have been served by our facility.

In the Milwaukee Public School System there are 15,691 children in grades 2 and 5 and 5,576 children in that same age group from non-MPS schools who will make the field trip to the Survive Alive House this year (roughly, this means that 70% of all Milwaukee area school children in the children in 2nd and 5th grade have been reached by this program). In 2002 we were open for 184 days and taught 345 programs to 14,871 students and 1,307 adults. Our mobile units were open from May through October and reached 27,080 people and taught 99 programs. For the second year in a row Milwaukee did not have a fire fatality in our target age group (7-12 year olds).

The Milwaukee Fire Department (MFD) provides a full-time staff of 5, manned by a Milwaukee Fire Department Lieutenant, Fire Safety Technician, two Administrative Assistants, a Maintenance Engineer and volunteers made up of community members, cadet firefighters and MPS Recreation Staff. There is a pool of 10 regular volunteers who also assist the MFD in operating the Survive Alive House throughout the year.

Project/Program Description

In the fall of 1987, a series of house fires devastated Milwaukee by claiming the lives of 35 people- 18 of whom were children. In response to this tragic loss of life, a Fire Prevention Task Force was appointed by then Mayor Henry Meier to explore ways to prevent future fire fatalities. As a result of the recommendations made by the Task Force it was felt that introducing children to fire safety at an early age would be an effective way of teaching children to “survive alive”.

In its inception, the project was developed through the commitment and contributions of several area partners including businesses, local politicians, governmental agencies and private individuals - all of whom donated time, money, equipment or other resources to see this vitally needed program come to fruition. Some of the partners in creating the Survive Alive House (in addition to MFD, MPS, MSC) were Allstate Insurance, Metropolitan Builders Association, Milwaukee Department of Building Inspection and the Milwaukee Common Council.

The Milwaukee Fire Department and MPS Department of Recreation are uniquely qualified to offer this program because of their combined expertise in the fields of fire prevention and youth programming, respectively. Both of our agencies are held as a community trust, and as such, have a civic and fiduciary responsibility to all residents of the city to provide these programs. Through our combined resources we have unparalleled access to our selected target group. By both agencies sharing resources to maintain staffing and maintenance, the Survive Alive House can literally help save lives.

The House has a maximum capacity to serve approximately 30 children per visit. At the Survive Alive House the children get an opportunity to try out their skills as they attempt to escape from a simulated burning house. The Survive Alive House is operational during the school year and selected periods during the summer. The facility is open from 8:30 AM to 2:30 PM throughout the academic year. A nominal fee is assessed for groups visiting the Survive Alive House to offset the costs of the materials used to provide education, instruction and to replace equipment that has a short life due to the constant use.

The Survive Alive House contains two replicas of a child's bedroom, complete with beds, dressers and toys. Electronically controlled "hot doors", fire simulated lighting and non-toxic smoke within the bedrooms all combine to offer a realistic fire experience for the students. A control booth located between the bedrooms contains the controls needed to operate various fire simulations (smoke, lighting and "hot doors"). Survive Alive House technician operates the simulation from the observation booth and is able to view each bedroom, providing additional supervision of the participants.

The education that is provided at the Survive Alive House is supplemented by the operation of two mobile units that travel to locations across metropolitan Milwaukee to bring the messages of fire safety and prevention to the entire community. The mobile units allow us to reach a greater audience through our participation at community-wide events such as Safety Days, shopping malls, Summer Fest, block parties, day care centers, community festivals, Fire Safety and Prevention Week events, State Fairs and other venues where thousands of community residents can receive valuable information about fire prevention.

Participants who currently visit the Survive Alive House not only experience a unique opportunity that includes classroom instruction, hands-on experience by going through the House, and educational materials – but they also are taught concepts, procedures and rules that may someday help them survive a fire. The curriculum that is being used in the House was developed jointly by the MFD, MPS and Milwaukee Safety Commission. The three part curriculum entails:

- 1) Children receive classroom instruction from their teachers in preparation of the field trip
- 2) Practical hands-on experience going through a simulated burning house
- 3) A post test administered at the students' school to determine their retention of knowledge

A typical program experience lasts approximately 1.5 –2.0 hours and includes 45 minutes of classroom instruction, 45 minutes for of the actual session in the house and a 15 minute review of what was done right or wrong while going through the House. Specific program topics include: 1) Fire detector checks 2) Getting otr of a burning house 3) Reporting a fire/using 911 4) Common causes of fires 4) Escape plans 5) General fire safety prevention 6) Burns & smoke inhalation.

While we feel we have been successful in getting fire safety and prevention messages out to the public (which is our primary mission), there are some enhancements to the program that we would like to make that would expand our ability to become more effective and reach other populations - thereby saving more lives. Since it is not possible to provide this program to every student or resident in the city we would like to engage in some of the following programs and methods to communicate our message of safety and prevention. Through increased funding we would like to implement the following:

- Implement a feasibility study to establish a second location
- Develop bilingual signage for those who are not proficient in English (Spanish & Hmong)

- Develop bilingual curriculum materials, activity sheets, publications and additional materials for those who are not proficient in English (Spanish & Hmong)
- Expand services to include senior citizens and conduct presentations in nursing homes & senior centers
- Purchase newer technology for our audio visual interactive and evaluation surveillance equipment
- Produce curriculum materials for different age groups (elementary, middle/high schools, adults, seniors and disabled populations)
- Provide and produce training videos and/or CD-ROMs of the program to provide to schools, community groups and other organizations that we do not have the capacity to serve at the House
- Make capital improvements to the facility (new roof, new flooring, escape ladders, smoke machines, etc.)
- Offer focus groups to meet specialized needs of different populations and cultures
- Replace or enhance our mobile units to serve more residents
- Supplement our general operating costs and provide additional programming features
- Expand our communications and printing budgets to allow for greater dissemination of information

These enhancements or additions to our existing programs would allow us to educate and disseminate our messages of fire prevention to the greater population, thus saving more lives in the future by reducing fire fatalities.

Sustainability

In order to realize these initiatives the Survive Alive Board has implemented a strategic planning process to help fund these additional program components. MFD and MPS members embarked upon developing fundraising strategies to enhance the program. Some of these strategies include applying for city/count/state block grants, federal appropriations, grants from other governmental agencies and private foundations (both local and national), fundraisers (annual golf outing and Harley-Davidson motorcycle raffle), and soliciting donations from private individuals. The top five funders that have kept this program operational over the past ten years are MPS, MFD, Allstate, Survive Alive Fundraising Committee and Time Warner Cable. This year marks the first year of concerted efforts to approach the members of the Foundations in Wisconsin and Donors Forum of Wisconsin to support our program. This program will be sustained through the commitment of the leadership from the Milwaukee Fire Department, MPS School Board of Directors as well as the combined efforts of all the agencies mentioned above; both throughout and after the completion of the grant award period.