

DANCE **MARATHON** **AT THE UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA**

Dance Marathon at the University of Florida
www.floridadm.org

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Mission and Purpose

Dance Marathon at the University of Florida strives to bring together the campus and community to raise funds and awareness for the kids at UF Health Shands Children's Hospital, our local Children's Miracle Network Hospital.

Dance Marathon at the University of Florida is a yearlong effort that culminates in a 26.2-hour event where over 800 students stay awake and on their feet to symbolize the obstacles faced by children with serious illnesses or injuries. The event raises money and awareness for UF Health Shands Children's Hospital, our local Children's Miracle Network Hospital, in Gainesville, FL. Our contributions are used where they are needed the most, including, but not limited to, purchasing life-saving medical equipment, funding pediatric research, and purchasing diversionary activities for the kids.

Organizational Structure

Dance Marathon is an organization composed of over 5,000 students with various levels of responsibility. The Overall Team (or executive board) is composed of 16 members. Four of these positions (Overall Director, External Communications Overall, Internal Communications Overall and Finance Overall) are managerial positions. The other executive positions include Art/Layout, Community Events, Dancer Relations, Entertainment, Family Relations, Hospitality, Marketing, Morale, Operations, Public Relations, Recruitment and Technology Overall Chairs. Most of these executive board members manage teams of 10-40 captains, all responsible for different tasks. In addition, four of these teams manage 70-250 staff members whose sole responsibility occurs at our main event.

Dance Marathon at UF is comprised of various organizations who work together to fundraise and participate in events throughout the year. Each of our 70 individual organizations that encompass our larger organization selects one or two delegates. These delegates represent their respective organization at general body meetings and are responsible for relaying information to all of their specific members.

In addition to all those who execute the event, 825 student "dancers" participate in the event, pledging to stand for 26.2 hours. Approximately 2,500 other members work to raise funds and awareness throughout the year.

The University provides us with two advisors as well as a student advisor. In addition, an advisor and graduate student advisor from Children's Miracle Network work with us as well.

Families who are treated at UF Health Shands Children's Hospital have the opportunity to sign up to be Miracle Families through Dance Marathon. These children and families serve as ambassadors to our cause. They often attend events and share their stories with our members. This serves as the driving force behind our cause. Miracle Children attend Family Days at the zoo, circus, playgrounds and UF sports games for free. At Dance Marathon at UF, we keep these children and their families at the heart of our organization.

Motivation on Campus

Three distinct features motivate our members above anything. The first is the burning passion all of our returning members have for our cause. Anyone who gives back through Dance Marathon and comes back to take part again feels such a connection to the work we do that it becomes almost contagious for new members.

The next motivating factor is the immediate bond many members experience when first interacting with the families we serve. We are fortunate enough to have numerous families who are more than willing to inspire new members by telling their stories. The beauty of our organization is that with an ever-growing list of Miracle Families involved,

more opportunities arise for students and families to make connections with each other. Seeing the connection that some members have with these families inspires newer students to become a part of our organization.

The simple fact that the hospital we serve is located on our campus motivates so many of our members, new and old. Every dollar we raise correlates to a machine at the hospital, equipment in a research lab, or some other item that we can physically see. Members go on tours of the hospital and the impact these tours are impressive. Meeting the kids and seeing directly where our funds go serve as powerful motivators for all involved.

All of these factors motivate our members to take part in our organization and give back to the kids. For most of our students, the Dance Marathon journey starts with a motivation to get involved but quickly transforms into a motivation to go above and beyond in giving back to the kids.

Strategy and Activities

Our event may only be one weekend in April, but Dance Marathon at UF is a year-long commitment to giving back. We focus on promoting awareness and raising funds to help the kids we serve each and every day.

Throughout the year, organizations compete for the prized “Miracle Cup” that is awarded at Dance Marathon. It is based on both dollars raised and spirit points. Spirit points are accumulated by the organization by participating in events throughout the year leading up to Dance Marathon. This encourages participation through both engagement and fundraising.

Community events and local fundraisers also promote our organization on campus and within our student body. Events on and off campus often bring a strong student following and, in many cases, are great ways to get new students to take part. These include fundraising nights at local popular restaurants, an annual 5K, bowling and kickball tournaments and kickoff barbeque celebration.

Results

Dance Marathon is considered the most successful student-run philanthropy in the Southeastern United States, raising over \$6.5 million for UF Health Shands Children’s Hospital over the last 19 years. In the past four years, our total funds raised have increased by at least 20% each year. In 2013, the year that our organization raised over a million dollars for the first time, our growth was over 30%.

We have also grown in terms of number of students involved. So far, this year, we have recruited 15 new organizations. All of these students have expanded our reach and as we continue to recruit new organizations, the impact will be even more substantial.

Our growth has proved to us that students are committed to our cause. The fact that students are eager to learn more about Dance Marathon when they attend freshman orientation has shown us that our impact is trickling down to an even younger generation of philanthropists.

As mentioned above, the proximity of our hospital allows us to know exactly how we are impacting the community. An expansion project of four new neighborhoods (or areas) in the hospital’s neonatal intensive-care unit (NICU) is set to begin in July. One of these four neighborhoods will be entirely funded by money raised from Dance Marathon at UF. This is just one of the powerful impacts our funds raised will have on the hospital.

Budget

In fiscal year 2013, Dance Marathon at UF incurred nearly \$90,000 in expenses ranging from venue rental fees to administrative expenses to the purchase of merchandise to be sold before and at our event. Dance Marathon at UF consistently meets a 7% expense ratio, as determined by our expenses as a percentage of our gross total funds raised. This is significantly lower than the non-profit industry average and makes us one of the most financially competitive philanthropies in the nation.

Sustainability Plan

Students who give back through Dance Marathon at UF often do so for their entire tenure at UF. Creating positive change in the world is what our student body strives to do both during and after college, so many students continue to donate to our cause long after they leave Gainesville.

In honor of our 20th year, we have created a Dance Marathon Alumni Association as a result of alumni interest we collected through a survey. The DMAA consist of 9 board members who have recently scripted bylaws and requirements for membership. Membership applications will go out to alumni in the next month to recruit members to take part and continue to give back through fundraising campaigns and social events, year after year.

Lessons Learned

What we have learned is simple. Come so far, got so far to go. This is one of our biggest lessons that our organization seems to re-learn every year. The progress we are able to make each year and the impact we have on campus and in the hospital is truly captivating. There is no denying this. The fact that we have recruited 15 new organizations this year is a great sign for the future. The fact that we have more students involved, more families involved, and more sponsors involved than ever before only points to success. Furthermore, seeing these individuals return year after year to continue to give back to our cause is a reminder that we improve the quality of life of those involved. New fundraisers and revamped community events have led to success we never expected to experience. However, the most successful part of our organization is that we know it's not perfect. We know it can constantly be improved.

We have learned that there is always room to inspire more and improve more. We have looked at first-year programs across the country and been inspired by their work. We've looked at programs who are similar but more experienced than ours and debated whether their best practices would be effective on our campus. This is the most important thing we have learned as an organization. We have been dancing for all the right reasons for 19 years, and so long as we continue to re-define success on a daily basis, we will continue to grow as an organization and make a profound impact on the lives of our children.