

Inspiring Congressional Support for a Life-Saving Cause

Padilla Speer Beardsley and Be The Match, Jan 1, 2013

Summary: 2013 Silver Anvil Award Winner — Events and Observances (Seven or Fewer Days) — Nonprofit Organizations

Having a voice on Capitol Hill is critical for nonprofit Be The Match to retain federal support and funding for its life-saving programs. This calls for an annual, day-long trip to Washington, D.C., to educate legislators. Be The Match turned to Padilla Speer Beardsley to plan and execute this critically important 2012 Legislative Day. Despite a limited budget and little time to plan, Legislative Day was a resounding success. Extensive media coverage fueled the day's efforts, and patient and donor advocates – alongside Be The Match's top leadership – participated in more than 30 meetings with legislators – 33 percent more than planned.

Events and observances (seven or fewer days) includes programs or events scheduled for one to seven consecutive days (not including planning and preparation). Events may include commemorations, observances, openings, celebrations or other special activities, and must occur within a time span of one week. The nonprofit subcategory is specifically intended for health and welfare organizations, as well as educational and cultural institutions not included in other subcategories.

Full Text: **OVERVIEW**

Federal support and funding for nonprofit Be The Match® is a matter of life and death for thousands of patients needing marrow transplants. Be The Match manages a registry of marrow donors and helps match patients to them. It also provides financial support for the uninsured who can't otherwise afford the costs associated with transplants.

Having a voice on Capitol Hill is critical for Be The Match to retain federal support and funding for its life-saving programs. Particularly, as looming talks of budget cuts, conflicting agendas of advocacy groups, and a continuous influx of new members to Congress threatened the organization's very purpose in 2012.

Maintaining this voice requires an annual, day-long trip to Washington, D.C., where patients, transplant recipients and donors alike converge on legislators who influence the continued funding for donor programs. The goal: To urge continued Congressional support of Be The Match and to educate Congress on the effects marrow donation has on life expectancy. By not achieving majority support from legislators for its programs – especially critical in 2012 – the reduction in federal funding means fewer patients receive the necessary marrow transplants that could save their lives.

Be The Match decided to seek outside assistance to plan and execute this year's critically important 2012 Legislative Day, and turned to Padilla Speer Beardsley. Despite a limited budget and little time to plan, Legislative Day was a resounding success. Extensive media coverage fueled the day's efforts, featuring inspiring stories that showcased how Be The Match directly impacts the patients and donors in key legislative locales.

In just one day, patient and donor advocates, alongside Be The Match's top leadership,

participated in more than 30 meetings with legislators and staffers – 33 percent more than planned. In addition, twice as many people on Capitol Hill joined the national registry that day, including Rep. Keith Ellison (D-Minn.), as in previous years.

RESEARCH

Primary

- Analyzed legislators' agendas to identify leaders most likely to champion Be The Match's life-saving cause.
- Researched, identified and interviewed patients, recipients and donors from the legislators' districts to determine ideal advocates to share their stories in Washington D.C.
- Reviewed Congressional calendars and area events to determine ideal timing for Legislative Day.

Secondary

- Conducted a media audit to uncover past stories and determine the best approaches to reach target audiences.

Key Findings

- Identified seven congressional districts as critical locales for Be The Match to focus relationship-building efforts, because those legislators had a potential or existing vested interest in the organization:
 - Bethlehem, Penn.; Brooklyn, N.Y.; Dallas; Etna, Calif.; Houston; Los Angeles and Minneapolis.
- Selected seven passionate advocates to share their personal experiences. The advocates, who resided in the key Congressional districts, had experiences that showcased the importance of Be The Match.
 - Jack Grubb, Etna, CA: a searching patient with myelodysplastic syndrome (MDS) who was denied a life-saving marrow transplant by health insurance.
 - Heather Fischl, Bethlehem, PA: a recipient who had difficulty identifying a donor, who demonstrated the need for a large, diverse registry.
 - Leila Family, Los Angeles: a young leukemia survivor and transplant recipient.
 - Betsy Lucas, Minneapolis: a recipient and young mother whose only hope was a transplant.
 - Jeffery McGowen, Houston: a marrow donor who helped save a young teenage boy's life.
 - Jennifer Jones Austin, Brooklyn, N.Y.: a recipient and mother whose only hope was a transplant.
 - Ray Johnston, Dallas: a recipient and former Dallas Mavericks basketball player, professional musician, five-time leukemia survivor and transplant recipient.
- Determined July 18 would be the best day to reach the most legislators and garner the most media interest.

PLANNING

Objectives

- Strengthen Be The Match relationships with legislative influencers by securing at least 20 face-to-face meetings on Legislative Day.
- Increase attendance at an annual marrow donor registry drive on Capitol Hill by 50 percent over the previous year.
- Achieve at least 15 news stories in markets represented by key legislative influencers to reinforce impact to their constituents.

- Secure at least one national news story to influence legislators' involvement in one-on-one meetings.

Target Audiences

- Legislators (and their staff) of districts in Be The Match's target markets who would champion the life-saving work of Be The Match in Congress.
- New and existing patient and donor advocates.

Target Media (as a conduit to above)

- Select national health care and political media.
- Local print, broadcast and online media in our seven identified markets.

Strategies

- Demonstrate direct impact of Be The Match through personal stories of lives affected by transplants.
- Influence legislative action to retain critical federal support and funding for marrow donation programs managed by Be The Match.

General Key Messages

- Every year, 10,000 patients nationally need a marrow transplant from someone outside of their family. These patients depend on Be The Match to find a donor.
- Federal support and funding is critical for Be The Match to continue adding people to its registry and helping patients with uninsured treatment costs – giving more patients hope for a transplant.

EXECUTION

The following tactics supported both of our identified strategies:

- Identified compelling stories of patients, recipients and donors in select target markets.
- Scheduled in-person meetings in Washington D.C. between Be The Match leaders and advocates, and legislators and staff to explain the critical life-saving role of Be The Match.
- Conducted message coaching session with advocates and Be The Match leadership to ensure consistent and accurate use of information during meetings. Provided detailed briefing books to all participants to ensure they were well-prepared for the legislative visits.
- Promoted the annual marrow donor registry drive on Capitol Hill via media and through posters, fliers and direct invitations to legislators and staff on the Hill.
- Developed and shared social media posts before, during and after the Legislative Day visits to heighten awareness of Be The Match's life-saving work.
- Launched a complementary media outreach campaign with tailored story angles to secure coverage nationally and in targeted local markets. Coordinated interviews, live shots and additional media requests.
- Shared resulting media placements with legislators in key congressional districts to further demonstrate work of Be The Match and the impact on their constituents.

EVALUATION

The campaign exceeded all expectations. In October, the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) again awarded contracts to Be The Match to administer the federal C.W. Bill Young Cell Transplantation Program. The renewal of these contracts, along with continued Congressional funding, ensures that Be The Match can continue to provide patients with the life-saving transplants they desperately need.

Objective One: Strengthen Be The Match relationships with legislative influencers by securing

at least 20 face-to-face meetings on Legislative Day.

- **Exceeded goal:** Coordinated 30 in-person meetings with legislators and staff.
- Rep. Ellison was so moved meeting with recipient Betsy Lucas that he joined the registry at the drive.

Objective Two: Increase attendance at an annual marrow donor registry drive on Capitol Hill by 50 percent over the previous year.

- **Exceeded goal:** Marrow donor registry drive recruited 30 new registry members, more than double the number of registrants from previous efforts on the Hill – despite a last-minute location change.
- Washington D.C.'s ABC affiliate previewed the drive in a segment about the need for more marrow donors.
- A photo of Rep. Ellison joining the registry received nearly 1,000 Facebook likes, setting an example for other legislators and making it the most-liked and commented Be The Match social media post to-date.

Objective Three: Achieve at least 15 news stories in markets represented by key legislative influencers to reinforce impact to their constituents.

- **Exceeded goal:** Earned 30 news stories in select markets – 96 percent of which contained at least two key messages – reaching 14.5 million people.
- The placements were shared with decision-making legislators to keep Be The Match's impact in their local communities top of mind.
- **Media highlight:** Jeffery McGowen's marrow donation story received front-page coverage in the Houston Chronicle's health section. The following day, a reader's letter to the editor credited Jeffery's story for inspiring her to join the registry.

Objective Four: Secure at least one national news story to influence legislators' involvement in one-on-one meetings.

- **Met goal:** U.S. News and World Report featured Rep. Doris Matsui's (D-Calif.) involvement with Be The Match and its 2012 Legislative Day.
- The national interview opportunity further cemented Be The Match's relationship with Congresswoman Matsui, an influential advocate who has led and supported marrow transplantation legislation in the past.

Public Relations Society of America © 2013

Product #: 6BW-1303F03