

New Software Helps Ronald McDonald House Understand Donors' Interests

Using fund-raising software is helping the Ronald McDonald House of Rochester, Minnesota, build better donor relationships, based on their donors' specific interests. While Ronald McDonald House is associated with Ronald McDonald House Charities (RMHC), a national organization supporting a variety of programs that improve the lives of children, each House is responsible for providing nearly all of its own funding. The Ronald McDonald House of Rochester now uses resultsplus!™ fund-raising software to capture data on existing and prospective donors in order to target its appeals and better serve their donors' needs. "As an example, if a person gives a gift in honor of someone, we tag that individual and are sure to provide them with future invitations to make another gift as a memorial to a loved one or in celebration of a birthday, etc.," said Maggie Schoepski, the Community Development Director for Rochester's House. "We also save money and increase our response rate by narrowing our audience for specific appeals to people who have expressed an interest in that area in the past." The resultsplus! software helps the organization closely track the results of each appeal, making it possible to improve future results by taking advantage of lessons learned in the past.

Rochester, Minnesota's Ronald McDonald House is one of over 200 Ronald McDonald Houses throughout the world that provide housing for families who have a child receiving medical care in the local area. The House provides a warm and caring atmosphere away from medical facilities. Children and parents benefit from the support of other families in the House going through similar situations. It also offers them the opportunity to keep their family life as normal as possible, in a place like home, where families are allowed to stay as long as their child is receiving medical care. Families get to relax together, cook together, play together, and sometimes cry together. Their stay may

The Ronald McDonald House of Rochester, Minnesota provides a home away from home... and gives support to families seeking medical care for their children.



be only a few nights or may extend to six months or more. Donations, grants, and money raised by special events enable the House to accommodate all families regardless of financial circumstances. Families are asked to contribute only \$10 per night for a room and no family is turned away because of an inability to pay.

The McDonald's Corporation provides support to these Houses in many ways. However, each Ronald McDonald House is a separate, individual non-profit 501(c)3 corporation, with its own board of trustees, and most annual support is provided within its own community. Rochester's Ronald McDonald House supports the families who seek medical care at the world-renowned Mayo Clinic, which is very supportive of the organization.

The decision to computerize

Fund-raising is a special priority now for the Ronald McDonald House of Rochester since the organization has added an 18-room expansion, nearly doubling its size. Funding comes from four main sources: 50% from general donations, 25% from special events, 15% from guest receipts, and 10% from other sources. "We determined a number of years ago that our ability to meet the needs of our guests depended upon actively and efficiently communicating with the many caring people who support our organization," Schoepski said. "So we made the decision to computerize our index cards and paper files. We selected

CUSTOMER



PROFILE

Headquarters

Rochester, Minnesota

Type of Business

Youth Care, Social Service

Web site

<http://www.ronhouserochmn.org>

results**plus!** software from Metafile™ Information Systems because it provides a powerful range of features yet is remarkably easy to use and relatively inexpensive. Since implementing the software, we have also become acquainted with the technical support Metafile provides. Their people are always able to understand and solve our problems and they are very friendly."

"results**plus!** helps us steward our donors by keeping track of their interests and thus better serving their needs," Schoepski said. "We can track the entirety of our relationship with each donor: every contact we make with a donor, every phone conversation with them, as well as whether they receive a mailer, make a contribution, or attend an event. Frequently, we enter notes about the donor that are stored in the software for easy access later. Here's an example: when I go to meet a corporate executive, he/she might mention to me that they raise therapy dogs, the dogs trained to serve as a companion to children with a serious illness. I record that fact in their file, so when I call the executive a month later, I have that information at my fingertips and can bring up our interest in providing therapy dogs for our families. We can also code that file to include them in any mailings or events that involve therapy dogs."

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- Maggie Schoepski
Community Development Director

Increasing efficiency of fund-raising process

Schoepski uses results**plus!** throughout the entire fund-raising process. A mailing begins by using the software to create lists that distinguish between different types of supporters, narrowing an appeal to reach people who have given at a particular level within a specific time-frame. When pledge cards are returned, the effectiveness of the mailing can easily be measured. The results**plus!** pledge management function enables tracking of donor pledges made, when pledge payments are due, and payments received. "The software provides a wide range of reports that help us track the effectiveness of our efforts and make management decisions," Schoepski said.

Demonstrating how this type of information can improve fund-raising effectiveness, Schoepski mentioned that she noticed from the reports that the average contribution

was steadily rising. "I wondered if perhaps we were not offering enough choices on our pledge card," she said. "Previously, the checkbox with the highest dollar amount was for \$50, so we added a \$75 box. We also changed the order of the boxes to run from highest to lowest, instead of lowest to highest which we used in the past. As a result of these simple changes, quite a few of our donors selected the \$75 box and our average contribution levels increased at an even higher rate." The organization is also testing different mailing formats, on a small scale, in order to improve their effectiveness over time.

Managing special events

Ronald McDonald House of Rochester also makes extensive use of results**plus!** for planning and managing their special events. Invitation lists are created using queries that pick invitees based on their interests, previous attendance record, and giving levels. For example: everyone who has attended this particular event in the past, plus everyone who has purchased a full table at any event, plus anyone who has ever contributed to the specific program that will benefit from this event. Schoepski also defines customizable fields in the database to record event-specific information, for instance, each runner's time in the annual 5-Kilometer Race.

"The secret of our success with this software is that it enables us to collect a lot of information and then makes it easy to call up that information in any form that we need it in the future," Schoepski said. "This helps us treat each of our donors as individuals and build our relationship with them one by one. Suppose one of our contributors is a businessperson who originally got involved with us because their child stayed with us while being treated for an illness. Having this information at our fingertips when we talk to them makes it possible to communicate on a much more personal level. By understanding the motivation behind their support for our mission, we can help our donors fulfill their charitable goals while we increase the number of children and families we are able to serve."

