

Collecting Money "Canning" for PAAL/MECA

Soliciting contributions at area businesses or "canning" can be an effective way to raise money for MECA's programs. Unlike more elaborate fundraisers, canning requires less preparation, fewer volunteer workers, and less expense. It is possible for a small group of family members and friends to raise a considerable sum in a weekend! Here are a few tips, should you decide to try this method.

Selecting a Location

Heavy shopper traffic is the main consideration in selecting your location. Since most contributors give one dollar, a lot of shoppers must come your way if your efforts are to pay off. Next, look for a store with no more than two entrances. You need to catch the eye of every shopper, so you must have a volunteer stationed at each entrance. Finally, check to be sure that a card table can be set up and leave room for shopping carts to get by. You want to be noticeable (from the parking lot if possible) but you don't want to get in the way of shoppers.

Obtaining Permission to Collect

Every store, even stores within the same chain, has a different policy concerning solicitation. Don't bother going online or calling to find out what this policy is. Instead, visit the manager at the service desk while you are in the store. At some stores, you can simply pencil MECA in for a weekend. Other stores may tell you that they never allow solicitation. Or you may have to come back with MECA documentation before you can be approved. In any event, it really pays to talk personally with the manager. You may learn that the store contributes to nonprofits in other ways---perhaps with gift certificates, and you can take advantage of these other contributions for MECA.

Selecting a Time to Collect

Ask the manager if there is a particularly busy time of day. In general, however, weekend traffic is heavier than weekday traffic and daytime traffic is heavier than nighttime.

Volunteers

One volunteer is needed to collect at each entrance. Ask your family members and friends to sign up for two hour shifts. Ask for a definite time commitment on their part, ie "Saturday from 2 til 4." Call the volunteer a week before the event and again the night before the event to remind them that you are counting on them.

It is best if volunteers are friendly and personable. They must be confident enough (and loud enough) to ask each shopper: "Will you give to kids with autism?" Ideally, volunteers should not bring friends, babies, pets, or young children with them. They are there to work. Ask all volunteers to make a clean appearance and to dress neatly.

What to Bring

Bring a card table and chair to set up at each entrance. Bring a decorated coffee can, trifold sign, and smaller foam board sign for each entrance. Bring small flyers to distribute: It is not necessary to bring autism ribbons, prizes, candy, etc to give to shoppers. This increases your costs and can also make your efforts less efficient, since it takes additional time to distribute and talk about these items.

Decorated Coffee Can

Large, plastic coffee containers with handles are best. (Buy them especially for this, then put your coffee into a ziplock bag.) Buy self- adhesive colorful foam sheets from hobby stores and use it to cover the writing on the coffee can. Cut out puzzle pieces and letters from the foam sheets. "AUTISM" or "PLEASE GIVE" can be spelled out on the coffee can in foam letters.

Tri-fold Sign

Large, tri-fold signboards can be purchased at hobby stores or office stores. Buy a bright color. Yellow is best. Buy 4 inch self adhesive foam letters at a hobby store and spell out "HELP SOLVE THE PUZZLE OF AUTISM" on your sign. Cut puzzle pieces out of foam sheets and stick them on the sign. If you have good, clear, large pictures of kids, these are excellent attention grabbers.

Foam board Sign

Foam board can be purchased at hobby or office stores. Write "PLEASE GIVE" or "HELP KIDS WITH AUTISM" in magic marker on these signs.

Small Flyers

You will find a sample flyer at the end of this article. A flyer should measure about 2 ½ inches by 3 ½ inches. You can print three flyers on a single sheet of paper, (for a more finished look, use yellow paper, and use red ink for headings on the flyer) then take them to an office store, where they will cut each page neatly into three parts.

What to Do and Say

Volunteers should catch the eye of every shopper entering or leaving the store, **smile**, and say "Hi, can you give to kids with autism today?" Say "thank you" when shoppers give and if shoppers say no, smile and say "that's ok, have a nice day." Avoid getting into long conversations with shoppers. If shoppers talk for a long time, say "I really wish I could talk to you, but I want to make sure I ask other shoppers to contribute to our cause. Here is our flyer. Call the number on the flyer to talk to someone who knows about this. Thank you!"

Caring for Money

Money should be collected after each shift. Bring ziplock bags or envelopes for this. Deposit the money into your checking account and write a check to MECA for the amount that you collected.