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Effect of COVID-19 Pandemic on Volunteerism and Fundraising management Strategies in nonprofits and rebuilding tactics of Ronald McDonald House Charities of Chicagoland and Northwest Indiana (RMHC-CNI)

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“Effect of COVID-19 Pandemic on Volunteerism and Fundraising management Strategies in nonprofits and rebuilding tactics of Ronald McDonald House Charities of Chicagoland and Northwest Indiana (RMHC-CNI)”

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Abstract

The financial sustainability of nonprofits depends highly on volunteerism and funding strategies which got impacted during Coronavirus 2019 (COVID-19) Pandemic. This capstone study explores to what extent nonprofits got affected and evaluates the efforts of Ronald McDonald House Charities of Chicagoland & Northwest Indiana (RMHC-CNI) to improve the provision of support for underprivileged families of critically ill children. The continual efforts to overcome financial hurdles escalated in pandemic. Mixed method research design was used to collect, analyze, and triangulate both quantitative and qualitative research methods in this single study to understand the research problem. Interpretive approach encompassed the complexities of nonprofits and presented a realistic picture. Results indicated that RMHC-CNI's strategies of innovation, adaptation, and technological advances in fundraising management and tackling shortage of volunteerism added demonstrated value to fundraisers and promoted community engagement. However, future planning is required as disease has escalated and massive shortfall in providing support for families with critically ill children battling serious illnesses has become more challenging. Pandemic has increased the capital costs of living and medical treatment. Through the study of world's leading nonprofit support, this research portrays the sustainability challenges of nonprofits in critical and evolving situations. Nonprofits serving high needs must plan for future financial viability. Thus, incorporating many community members, encouraging small donations, utilizing recyclables as charity, and strategically introducing innovative tactics would help in overcoming many future challenges. This study would hopefully enhance further research in promoting promising practices of nonprofits and fostering a culture of resilience for sustaining financial health.

Introduction

Future often creates a picture mixed with uncertainty. Wars, poverty, and diseases are the images that trigger fear among people. Recently, the whole world faced a global pandemic due to the spread of a novel virus known as COVID-19. The outbreak of a severe acute infectious disease caused countless deaths (John Hopkins University & Medicine, 2022). The lockdown to prevent the spread of this disease brought an economic crisis (Meyer et al., 2022).

Unemployment, death, disease, and uncertainty created chaos and distress. Nonprofit sector suffered the most as it depends on funding resources and volunteers (Newby and Braynon, 2021). All over the world, the generosity of donors and volunteers dropped out immensely (Harty, 2021). The call of the time was to instill unique directive measures with innovative inclusivity in planning and managing funding strategies and rebuilding volunteerism for sustainability of nonprofits. This capstone project captured the challenges of a non-profit organization, Ronald McDonald House Charities of Chicagoland & Northwest Indiana (RMHC-CNI) during the pandemic. RMHC-CNI is committed to serve families of critically ill children by providing them boarding rooms and meals while their children are hospitalized. Volunteering and fundraising are crucial components of this organization and were substantially disrupted during pandemic. Moreover, the escalation of disease required continual efforts to update information and build a more reliable support system (Ronald McDonald House Charities Chicagoland & Northwest Indiana [e], 2021). The core question of this capstone project is to what extent were fundraising and volunteer management strategies got affected by COVID-19 Pandemic and how did RMHC-CNI rebuild volunteer and fundraising base? This study would benefit many non-profits and non-government organizations to help people in impoverished domains during critical times.

Literature Review

Nonprofit and NGO organizations have always worked to make a beneficial difference in the community. However, COVID-19 pandemic put many nonprofits in financial jeopardy. Nonprofits' finance is complex as it depends on contributions, earned revenue, grants, and contractual services (Dr. Schatteman, 2020). The uncertainty of this pandemic brought chaos and distress in the functionality of organizations (Meyer et al., 2022). Fundraising projects and volunteers declined. Eventually, continual changing situation in pandemic created a collective calculus of ambiguity. A view in its implications can help in understanding the struggle of nonprofits during pandemic.

COVID-19 Implications

The COVID-19 pandemic resulted in many deaths globally (John Hopkins University & Medicine, 2022). It sparked fear of an impending economic crisis and social distancing reduced workforce. In contrast, the need for medical supplies significantly increased (Harty, 2021). Many research studies reflect devastating pictures of the pandemic, and every sector started a development plan to survive. "Huskie Commons" in Northern Illinois University presented reports, white papers, articles, and other publications of governmental studies in "Changing Expenditure Patterns in Illinois Municipalities" by Andy Blanke and Norman Walzer (2020), which elaborates exploration of expenses and insightful planning for the future. This portrays not only the obstacles of current time and problems emerged by pandemic; indeed, it suggests future planning for controlling finances. However, the detrimental impact on underprivileged groups in vulnerable situations and suggestions for their recovery were not fully grasped. The need to uplift the struggling community in time of crisis is a very important socioeconomic phase which was not vividly covered because the study mostly explored on expenditure patterns and

expenses' control. Overall, the analysis expanded the comprehension of pandemic implications. This serves as a strong base to understand the intense negative impacts of pandemic on financial health of organizations.

Thematic Clusters and Shortage of Participants

In the past, the negative effects of crisis had been effectively handled by nonprofits. They have played a key role in ensuring support. Unfortunately, the fundraising deficits and shortage of volunteers due to the placement of restrictions in COVID-19 pandemic shook the integrity and operational programs of nonprofits. Many thematic literatures on pandemic problems emerged, which showcased the wide unavailability of participants. An impactful source, "Pivoting Services: Resilience in the Face of Disruptions in Nonprofit Organizations Caused by COVID-19" by Kara Newby and Brittany Branyon (2021) clearly presents the significance of volunteers. "The inability to meet with clients and the stress of pivoting to an online environment is as great or greater of a burden as the financial impact" (Newby & Branyon, 2021). Volunteers provide several benefits including social, emotional, and physical perks. This source highlighted many problems that occurred due to the shortage of volunteers. Another study "COVID-19 Related Studies of Nonprofit Management: A Critical Review and Research Agenda" by Márcia R. C. Santos & Raul M. S. Laureano (2021), portrayed that workforce was needed for the execution of plans and programs. It emphasized on effective communication and collaboration of participants that make a difference in the entire culture and climate of the community. It also pointed out that the pandemic presented many elaborate research studies which were conducted to stabilize the escalating situations. Such studies help in identifying problems that build strategic thinking (Santos & Laureano, 2021). The only flaw in this exploration was that theoretical part was strong, but suggestions for practical implementations were lacking. There is a vivid description

of problems with little suggestions for resolutions. Since, nonprofits were in peril therefore, plans were required to stabilize and rethink many avenues. Chiefly, the critical review defined operative issues of nonprofits during pandemic.

Preventive plans to minimize negative consequences

At a quick glance, it appeared like an opportunity to test which nonprofits had better planning and were prepared for COVID-19 pandemic. Since, nonprofits have a complex structure, therefore it is hard to find concrete plans. Complexity of nonprofits have always been spotted by many experts because multiple factors impact the success and development of the organizations. For instance, one analytical study, “Location, Marketing, and the Financial Flexibility of Nonprofit Performing Arts Organizations in Second Tier Cities” by Christine A. Lai and Jessie P. H. Poon (2009) highlighted the effect of location in relation to many other marketing strategies that help in determining the financial flexibility to provide a framework for deeper analysis (Lai & Poon, 2009). Likewise, many statistical studies projected research into understanding of problems that affected sustainability of nonprofits during pandemic. One year into the pandemic presented 154 academic articles on nonprofit management (Santos & Laureano, 2021). Such findings state resilience and an urge in prompting initiative measures during crisis. The donors and beneficiaries can benefit from all these research studies and adapt leadership. Digital transformation, modernizing programs, and recovering from crisis brought innovation. Thus, the thematic clusters prompted critical thinking. A lot of theories were used to understand the challenges of pandemic, “... such as the contingency theory of organizations and the unified theory of acceptance and use of technology scholars will be able to expand more systematically...” (Santos & Laureano, 2021). These are valuable contributions that can pave

paths for combating future calamities. The pandemic caused many deaths, but the rapid research saved many lives that opened many doors.

Comprehensive study on structuring strategies

The extensive and detailed research can teach skills and develop future strategies in building organization's prosperity. One such comprehensive study intensifies the wide range and unique requirements of facilities; "McHenry County Nonprofit Study 2021 Report" by Dr. Alicia Schatteman (2021) is a productive study that started in 2020 when COVID-19 pandemic emerged. It presented funding challenges that became more glaring in pandemic. It can also be seen as a collaboration or coalition because several agencies partnered in this research. Many diverse nonprofit organizations, in their own unique way, tried to improve the community by building bridges of trust and hope. The community analysis of existing datasets and information along with surveys make "McHenry County Nonprofit Study", a very worthwhile contribution in research.

Furthermore, an interesting probing study "How Chicago Economics Helped End a Pandemic" by Casey B. Mulligan (2021), showcases federal programs accelerated development of medicines, vaccines, and surplus necessities to end COVID-19 pandemic. Chicago's equitable economic recovery and relief plan helped the communities who were hit hardest by the pandemic and spurred innovation (Mulligan, 2021). This is a very useful and strategic study that shows execution of plans to handle crisis. Likewise, World Health Organization (2020) submitted "Part 2. Responding to the COVID-19 pandemic in long-term care" which sketched a report of preventing and managing COVID-19 pandemic with continuing care to induce health and dignity for all countries. WHO (2020) constructed eleven policy objectives to mitigate the impact of the pandemic for long term care. It depicts inclusion, mobilization, effectiveness, security,

continuity, prevention, prioritizing, support, and psychological well-being. This study is valuable in provision of community-based care at a global level and serves as a guidance for future crisis. Through this document, health equity is prompted as a shared quality around the world which presents dignity of human life. It is a good source to analyze the world as a global community in time of crisis.

Forefront efforts

All the above sources, prioritize better decision-making and importance of planning tactics for handling crisis. The groundwork of Dr. Alicia Schatteman (2020) in “Nonprofit Financial Resilience: Before and After COVID19” presents the complexities of nonprofits and significance of financial health. It is a helpful analysis to map out strategies by knowing the core elements. Similarly, the article of “Pandemic-Era Uncertainty” (Meyer et al., 2022) suggests that unanswered questions can prepare us for adaptations and modifications in times of ambiguities. Even though nonprofits were at stake in pandemic; humanitarian cause was at forefront. The academic sources provided a truly important picture of COVID-19 pandemic. The breadth and longevity of crisis was unknown, nevertheless strategies build sustainability and resilience in nonprofits.

Financial management and innovation in nonprofits

Fundraising loss and lack of innovative vision were eminent in pandemic. An elaborative exploration highlights innovation in *The Role of Power in Nonprofit Innovation* by Graham Dover and Thomas B. Lawrence (2012). It stressed the power of nonprofits by examining the perpetual innovation. This study presents transformation of ideas, tackling of problems, and identification of risks as important aspects of nonprofits. This distinct feature that facilitates growth with the changing time enhances understanding and functioning of nonprofits during

pandemic. Similarly, another study *Financial Management in Non-Profit Organization: An Exploratory Study* by Barry Strydom and Tim Stephen (2014) examines financial crisis that requires changes in financial management. The main objective of this study was to investigate the use of innovative financial management tactics that helped nonprofits survive global financial crisis in the past. Since nonprofits play a major role in addressing social challenges, all research studies that identify impact on financial viability and suggest productivity through innovation, can help in further research and sustainability of nonprofits.

Methodology

The case description of my research focused on what fundraising and volunteer management strategies got affected by COVID-19 pandemic and how Ronald McDonald House Charities & Northwest Indiana (RMHC-CNI) rebuild volunteer and financial base? RMHC-CNI is a nonprofit organization under Section 501(c)(3), that supports underprivileged families with critically ill children. The years 2020 and 2021 of COVID-19 pandemic were full of challenges and uncertainties as many businesses were disrupted and supply chain was interrupted. This organization was chosen as the subject of this case study research because offering medical care and resources to poor families with sick children during pandemic was extremely difficult and rose new financial challenges (Quest Food Management Services, 2021). Tackling daily operations, facing shortage of supplies, handling massive shortfall of staff, and overcoming fundraising deficits were huge obstacles to encounter.

Historical Leadership and Governance

The first Ronald McDonald House was built in Philadelphia in 1974, when a Philadelphian Eagles football player, Fred Hill, had his three-year-old daughter being treated for a critically ill disease and Fred camped out on hospital chairs, while eating out of vending

machines. He raised funds for families with critically ill children by establishing temporary residence that slowly became a global network of local healthcare providers and countless community partners (Ronald McDonald House Charities of Capital Region). In 1977, Ronald McDonald House Charities in Chicagoland & Northwest Indiana was built, and they helped 100,000 families of hospitalized children to stay together over the last decades (Ronald McDonald House Charities Chicagoland & Northwest Indiana [c]). They also run Ronald McDonald Care Mobile Programs to bring medical, dental, and health care resources to underserved communities (Ronald McDonald House Charities Chicagoland & Northwest Indiana [d]). The governance of RMHC leads, strengthens, and unites management (Ronald McDonald House Charities of the Bluegrass). Furthermore, the track of accountability and transparency policies ensures good governance and integrity of the organization. Five Ronald McDonald Houses, three Ronald McDonald Family Rooms, and Ronald McDonald Care Mobile programs have 27 board of directors (Ronald McDonald House Charities Chicagoland & Northwest Indiana [a]) who give countless operational hours.

Size

A team of volunteers with day and overnight managers, a Family Room manager, a house chef, servers, cleaners, nurses, and administrative staff of 51-200 are all on-site. Interns of Volunteer Services help the staff with daily operative services. However, 75% of volunteers' shortage appeared due to the COVID-19 Pandemic (Nonprofit Opportunities). Shortage of staff generated multiple challenges of cooking, cleaning, and accommodating (Ronald McDonald House Charities of Chicagoland & Northwest Indiana [b]). Before pandemic, RMHC had a 4-star rating for exceptional nonprofit organization's financial health by meeting 96% of program

expenses (Charity Navigator). Pandemic reduced fundraising and volunteers, whereas more families of sick children needed support.

Programs

Ronald McDonald Houses in the Chicagoland area has five programs which are Ronald McDonald House near Advocate Children's Hospital (Oak Lawn), Ronald McDonald House near Loyola University (Hines/Maywood), Ronald McDonald House near Ann & Robert Lurie Children's (Chicago-Streeterville), Ronald McDonald House near Northwestern Medicine Central DuPage Hospital (Winfield), and Ronald McDonald House near University of Chicago Medicine (Chicago-Hyde Park). Each RMHC provides cooked meals, laundry, cleaning, computer facilities, recreation, medical needs, and all comforts to measure success (GuideStar). Even during pandemic, they provided vaccines, physicals, meals, clothing, education, fun murals, and security to all families. The 2021 year emphasized the need to expand programs of medical services in 2022 and 2023 by opening a new Ronald McDonald House inside Northwestern Medicine Prentice Women's Hospital and Ronald McDonald House Family Room in Park Ridge (Ronald McDonald House Charities of Chicagoland & Northwest Indiana [g]). A collaborative process with the local corporate partners and businesses is bringing a global advisory to support this unique organization that provides a "home away from home" for seriously ill children. Through this case study of RMHC-CNI, sources of revenue, expenditure, and management can evaluate future sustainability of nonprofits.

The capstone project explored what fundraising and volunteer management strategies did Ronald McDonald House Charities of Chicagoland and Northwest Indiana (RMHC-CNI) implement during the COVID-19 pandemic? This study used mixed methods combining elements of quantitative and qualitative research which achieved a greater insight. Quantitative

research involved collecting numerical data and the mathematical variations exhibited financial deficit. It was taken from government sources and official sites of Internal Revenue Services (IRS) such as Exempt Organization Public Disclosure and Availability and Cause IQ that verified the financial health of RMHC-CNI for the years 2019, 2020, and 2021 which were pandemic years (Cause IQ, 2021). This raw data depicted how expenses were strategically utilized for escalated needs. The volunteer challenge that occurred in pandemic was analyzed by qualitative method through interpretation from comprehensive narrative of news articles, RMHC-CNI website, and news reports. It gave in-depth study into the phenomenon of the problem and resolution. The collaboration of community resources through provision of virtual opportunities (Volunteer Match) and building fundraising campaign through celebrities (Look To The Stars) thoroughly showcased innovative techniques. Thus, both quantitative and qualitative approach helped in deductive reasoning and inductive prudence. The combination of both methods in this study strengthened the research by giving authenticity and accuracy. For instance, just by visualizing numerical data, it seemed that RMHC-CNI had no challenges in COVID-19 pandemic as variations were not huge. However, by studying and observing information, acknowledgement of an increase of disease, shortage of volunteers, and excessive medical expenses were vivid. The blend of both methods reflected deeper observations. By reviewing and analyzing RMHC-CNI's financial statements and reports, it was evident that financial management policies and tactics were used in balance data and cash flow (Ronald McDonald House Charities of Chicagoland & Northwest Indiana, 2022). The availability of professional advisors and corporate partners gave accuracy and authenticity in utilizing expenses by prioritizing needs (Ronald McDonald House Charities of Chicagoland & Northwest Indiana [k]). Secondary sources utilized in this research helped in interpretation and restatement of

primary sources. They were not commentaries or generalizations. Indeed, articles from news, journals, research, news reports, authentic websites, and critical reviews were studied. These reputable secondary sources of RMHC-CNI's corporate partners, interpretive advisory council, and website reports helped in making an unbiased analysis. The articles' databases and provider's purpose were evaluated for credibility. Such findings built an integration process to present reliable results.

Convergent parallel design of qualitative and quantitative data brought deductive and inductive reasoning into the study of this capstone project. Data collection provided information on RMHC-CNI's problems and resolutions, while data analysis helped in investigation of useful strategies. These tools interpreted how RMHC-CNI survived a global crisis of COVID-19 pandemic. RMHC-CNI is a recognized public charity under section 509(a) and 501(c)(3) status with a financial management plan built by outstanding students, who pursue higher education and by community partners who believe in uplifting the humanitarian cause (Ronald McDonald House of Forth Worth, 2018). The annual income is always primarily used for addressing immediate needs of underserved families of sick children (Charity Navigator). The RMHC-CNI website has facts, health information, updated contents, and program details (Ronald McDonald House Charities). By gathering and analyzing accurate data from reliable sources; the answer to the research question was presented. This study also presents a relationship between quantitative and qualitative methods to bring an intensive involvement in research for implications of reliable findings.

Results, Implications, and Recommendations

Informative and thought-provoking data was collected in exploring to what extent were fundraising and volunteer management strategies got affected by COVID-19 pandemic and how

did Ronald McDonald House Charities of Chicagoland & Northwest Indiana (RMHC-CNI) implement innovative and resourceful tactics to combat the financial deficit and volunteer shortage? Quantitative and qualitative research methods gave a better understanding, while the triangulation process enhanced the validity of this capstone study.

Results

The fundraising and volunteer management strategies were challenged and impugned during COVID-19 pandemic for nonprofits. Families of RMHC-CNI faced emotional and economic pressure.

Conducting evaluation through authoritative sources

This capstone study utilized authoritative sources. The financial status of RMHC-CNI was checked from the official website of Internal Revenue Services (IRS), Public Disclosure Form 990, and verified by Guide Star, Cause IQ, and RMHC-CNI's financial reports. The years 2019, 2020, and 2021 were evaluated as pandemic years because cumulative and confirmed cases and deaths were seen all over the world due to COVID-19 (World Health Organization, 2020 & John Hopkins University of Medicine, 2022). The years of 2018 and 2022 were analyzed to capture preparedness and recovery juncture. The lingering effects of COVID-19 slowed all services, therefore different sites were triangulated to ensure the net assets. At a quick glance of RMHC-CNI finances, 2019 had \$67,353,126 net assets which fell to \$66,769,891 in 2020 but increased to \$70,593,894 in 2021 (RMHC-CNI, 2021). This glimpse of financial changes should not mislead the fact that RMHC-CNI had no challenges. Audited Financials exhibit donor restrictions, scholarships, payroll expenses, hardware/software equipment expenses, supplies, professional fees, travel, and support services for operating expenses which are vital and increased during pandemic (Ronald McDonald House Charities of Chicagoland & Northwest

Indiana, 2022). Investment-related expenses can only be used if net assets are available without donor restrictions. Therefore, operating revenues excluding investment are generated from individuals, corporate partners, foundations, grants, donations, and special fundraising events which are available to be viewed in the annual reports of RMCH-CNI (Ronald McDonald House Charities Chicagoland & Northwest Indiana [f], 2020, & Ronald McDonald House Charities Chicagoland & Northwest Indiana [g], 2021, & Ronald McDonald House Charities of Chicagoland & Northwest Indiana, 2022). Funds declined and pandemic challenges increased the number of families who needed support as more children got sick and volunteer shortage threatened the stability of the support program of RMHC-CNI. There were not enough rooms, and a shortage of volunteers arose due to the suspension of the volunteer program (Ronald McDonald House Charities of Chicagoland & Northwest Indiana, 2022). If previous years of RMHC-CNI finances are reviewed, then 2018 had \$65,087,150 net assets and 2017 had \$62,639,196 (Ronald McDonald House Charities of Chicagoland & Northwest Indiana, 2022), which shows that despite low assets of previous years, the financial stability was secure because the disease and prices of medicines were not escalated. Moreover, the workforce was readily available. Whereas the healthcare costs spiked due to the soaring medicine prices and shortage of professionals, created distress. Thus, RMHC-CNI navigated with many tactics.

Cohesive strategy to raise funds

Financial status of RMHC-CNI was visualized by quantitative method which efficiently and objectively showed funds and expenses. However, focus on numbers only present statistical relationship and cannot be used for broader themes. Nonprofits have a complex structure therefore, sharp analysis through qualitative method analyzed that higher funds were exhausted because the needs were high. The pandemic made healthcare very fragile and expensive.

Massive growth in medical expenses and rising inflation of fuel and food prices brought operational challenges which were all acknowledged by RMHC-CNI. To give accurate and reliable information to the community, “COVID-19 Program Update & How You Can Help Families” (Ronald McDonald House Charities of Chicagoland & Northwest Indiana [e], 2021) was formulated for giving latest updates to join the efforts. Medical care for chronic patients continued, thousands of meals were served, families were hosted in “House and Family Rooms”, and in-person volunteering continued during pandemic. Innovative programs such as “Wish List and Care Kits” were introduced to provide support to families without physical contact (Ronald McDonald House Charities of Chicagoland & Northwest Indiana [e], 2021). This cohesive strategy showed consistency of the program and collaboration of the community. Ronald McDonald Care Mobile program has partnership with Advocate Children’s Hospital and continued with its services of health screenings, immunizations, and treatment, remotely. The backpack distribution program with school supplies, toiletries, and non-perishable food items were stretched to 2,300 backpacks, including 600 backpacks with two-days' worth of meals in 2019 to minimize food insecurity. Local food pantries also got a referral list to support underprivileged families (Ronald McDonald House Charities of Chicagoland & Northwest Indiana Care Mobile [d]). The acknowledgement of people's problems built a community alignment, and a shared vision of support gave integrity in dire times. RMHC-CNI provides professional advising that value honesty and integrity when serving clients with a free and no-obligation illustration of their gifts to RMHC-CNI. The “Gift Illustrator” tool calculates deductions, tax savings, and other benefits instantly for multiple gift types (Ronald McDonald House Charities of Chicagoland & Northwest Indiana [k]). These documents and news reports presented in-depth understanding through qualitative analysis which gave definition to RMHC-

CNI as a united group and exhibited its commitment in the time of distress that brought people to work at their optimum level. Pandemic was declared as an era of uncertainty (Meyer et al., 2022), so bringing togetherness and solidarity made many corporate partners continue their support and sponsorship with RMHC-CNI. When RMHC-CNI decided not to close doors, then it exhibited resilience and inhibited cohesion which brought unification among community partners.

Rebuilding mission and vision

Community support played a dynamic role in the pandemic. RMHC-CNI partnered with Wintrust Marketing, who provided support and resources that enabled families to get together outdoors and build a mural on the 1-90/94 expressway. The mural displays families embraced by healthcare professionals and support services to get better together (Ronald McDonald House Charities of Chicagoland & Northwest Indiana [i], 2021). Adding colorful art on building's walls never go unnoticed and it renewed the mission and vision of RMHC-CNI during pandemic.

Marathon Race Strategy

Another crushing factor of Pandemic was the inability to conduct big fundraising events such as concerts, auctions, marathons, cookouts, and more. In 2020 and 2021, there is no findings from any reliable source to show if any marathon was accomplished by RMHC-CNI or how much was raised through other big public event, even though there were many requests posted on social media to consider joining the marathon, (RMHC [ab], 2020, & Ronald McDonald House Durham & Wake, 2021) but none showed accurate results. However, in 2022, RMHC-CNI started the marathon with a goal of \$1,500,000 and raised \$1,840,120 (RMHC [cd], 2022). It presented tutelage and sustainability by keeping old strategies and building new skills to endure hardships. This process of naturalistic inquiry portrays the social phenomena of

RMHC-CNI and how it persists on its mission operatives. The research study also triangulates the credibility of the findings through multiple sources as only reliable and explicit results are spotlighted.

Transformational innovative strategies

Furthermore, the shortage of volunteers created significant problems in navigating the support program of RMHC-CNI. Volunteering has always been challenging due to the lack of free time, but in pandemic many volunteer programs shut down. RMHC-CNI arranged fun activities, event games, cook-out lunch, silent auction, and raffle prizes that geared towards sporting clays enthusiast to attract and inspire volunteers. These innovative events raised \$200,000 to provide 2,105 nights that families could stay near their hospitalized children in 2020 (Eastern Worldwide, 2020). It also supported families' well-being by linking them through a "Red Treehouse" website, where communities could connect and share stories. It inspired the hope and self-determination needed for struggling families (Red Treehouse). RMHC-CNI presented the goal of helping the sick during pandemic through transformational tactics globally and Rensair, a UK-based company provided support to RMHC-CNI by learning about its challenges and determination of not giving up (Rensair, 2021). Moreover, multiple interactive virtual programs were introduced to RMHC-CNI by "Virtual True", digital transformative service, that provided a broader vision of unification without being physically available (Leiser, 2020). Similarly, "Un-Gala" fundraiser adapted to pandemic and lots of cooking, musical, and other fun programs were launched that brought many church volunteers to join RMHC-CNI (Kevin, 2020). Thus, transformational innovation with lasting effects were seen on the core structure. The innovative ways to get involved in volunteering which initiated in 2020 are still prevalent (Ronald McDonald House Charities of Chicagoland & Northwest Indiana [h], 2020).

This research study exhibits many complex problems of RMHC-CNI that emerged in pandemic specifically in fundraising and volunteering that were tackled by innovative resolutions.

Implications

The glaring implications of this capstone study is the recognition that fundraising, and volunteer management were adversely affected in pandemic. There is a deep analysis of strategic measures taken by Ronald McDonald House Charities of Chicagoland & Northwest Indiana (RMHC-CNI) for rebuilding resilience, flexibility, and pivoting to survive during crisis.

Resilience

Many research studies highlighted how better measures impacted the performance of nonprofits during crisis. An important study, “Pivoting Services: Resilience in the Face of Disruptions in Nonprofit Organizations Caused by COVID-19” by Kara Newby and Brittany Branyon (2021), serves as a preliminary in understanding how nonprofits have dealt with the loss of in-person services and adapted with the new situation in pandemic. The resilience framework was evident in RMHC-CNI when lack of volunteers was retrieved by virtual opportunities (Ronald McDonald House Charities Chicagoland & Northwest Indiana [h], 2020). The fact that nonprofits work for solidarity and community development was clearly accentuated in “COVID-19 Related Studies of Nonprofit Management: A Critical Review and Research Agenda” by Marcia R. C. Santos and Raul M.S. Laureano (2021) which identified that in the year 2020, 154 academic articles were conducted on nonprofit management during the pandemic. Many experts provided useful tactics and highlighted how technological gaps became a huge obstacle and many nonprofits failed to overcome it (Santos & Laureano, 2021). Whereas RMHC-CNI exhibited technological advances through “COVID-19 Program Update & How You Can Help Families” along with “Look To The Stars, Celebrity Supporters & Events”, “Quest Food

Management Services”, “Virtual True Take Over the Week”, “Red Treehouse”, and “Eastern Worldwide”. Many more donors, sponsors, and supporters’ websites were renewed to ensure that employees and volunteers could get services into virtual modes. It showed overcoming of technological gap by establishing more partnerships that enhanced resilience and inspiration of RMHC-CNI through efficient adaptation.

Interactivity and flexibility

Significantly, inventiveness and resourcefulness were the dire need of pandemic as everything seemed to shut down without any anticipated timeframe. “Pandemic-Era Uncertainty” by Meyer et al. (2022), examined how every sector was impacted because no one knew when productions would re-start, or businesses, schools, and universities would re-open. The elevated uncertainties accentuated restraint on future planning. Some studies like “Changing Expenditure Patterns in Illinois Municipalities” by Andy Blanke and Norman Walzer (2020), proposed to adjust expenses as pandemic resembled previous recessions. However, this cut in expenses could not be applied to RMHC-CNI as more people got sick and the mission of the organization was to help them in critical times. But adjustments were made by increasing donations (Ronald McDonald Charities Chicagoland & Northwest Indiana [d]). The theoretical and logical inference is to meet crucial needs in crisis. Another study showed the impact of COVID-19 and presented initiative and interactive measures during pandemic is “McHenry County Nonprofit Study” by Dr. Alicia Schatteman (2021). It proposed methods to finance and fund COVID-19 through local, state, and federal government. Every challenge was analyzed and presented with some resolution. However, the long-term impact of pandemic could not be encompassed. No theory can play as a conceptual anchor in nonprofits due to the complexities of its framework. Thus, immediate initiatives were made according to the need in RMHC-CNI without any

permanent fixtures or resolutions that would avoid prolonged upheavals in facing crisis. Thus, RMHC-CNI needs a long-term reliable program to survive in the future.

Innovations

Additionally, the research presented innovative tactics of RMHC-CNI. COVID-19 pandemic's impact on social, behavioral, and economic outcomes can be seen through "The Role of Power In Nonprofit Innovation" by Graham Dover and Thomas B. Lawrence (2012) who suggested that previous crisis situations were handled by the innovation process of nonprofits. Likewise, "Financial Management in Non-Profit Organizations: An Exploratory Study" by Barry Strydom and Tim Stephen (2014), emphasized decline in nonprofit funds due to monetary crisis and pinpointed that only nonprofit with sound economic management practices survived. Both the above studies were reflected through Ronald McDonald House Charities of Chicagoland & Northwest Indiana (RMHC-CNI) as innovative programs and efforts to raise funds were projected during pandemic. Moreover, the effect of specific factors giving advantageous benefit as mentioned in "Location, Marketing, and the Financial Flexibility of Nonprofit Performing Arts Organizations in Second Tier Cities" by Christine A. Lai and Jessie P.H. Poon (2009), exhibits that the locational factor is a strategic asset for the arts industry. Many factors and situations can bring innovative success and help an organization survive in critical times. The analysis of RMHC-CNI's successful adaptation during pandemic can be examined through its locational benefit of being in the populous and diverse locality close to the hospitals encircled with the cluster of businesses. Many authentic studies synchronize and converge with the strategic measures taken by RMHC-CNI during pandemic.

Extensive and deep implications

Comprehensively, combating COVID-19 provided many guidelines to navigate in critical times, but many governments and communities are still grappling with the impact of pandemic. Even though, World Health Organization (2020) introduced “Part 2 Responding to the COVID-19 pandemic in long-term care”, and successfully identified a long-term cure in the future but it is not yet known if it will be productive. A critical study on “How Chicago Economics Helped End a Pandemic” by Casey B. Mulligan (2021) declares the end of a tragic milestone, but many are people sick currently as coronavirus has only evolved and is not completely eradicated. There might be more global disasters like unemployment, wars, and extreme poverty. Thus, declaration of culmination is not the conclusion of pandemic. However, a fully accurate and genuine picture was vividly seen in “Nonprofit Financial Resilience: Before and After COVID-19” by Dr. Alicia Schatteman (2020) that nonprofits have a complex structure, and every nonprofit must analyze and focus on its own dire needs. Only future studies would be able to examine sustainability strategies as needs and services change with changing times. Such extensive and deep implication present transformation of challenges that would require new imaginative solutions to survive in the future.

Recommendations

In the recent years of COVID-19 pandemic, many changes occurred all over the world. It can be inferred that viruses have evolved, or human bodies have developed immunity. To mask or not to mask has become a personal preference. This capstone study has highlighted adverse impact on funding and volunteering management in nonprofits during pandemic, along with the efforts of Ronald McDonald House Charities of Chicagoland & Northwest Indiana’s (RMHC-CNI) ability to sustain. Studies and research keep changing, but preparation to implement

planning, interventions, and updating recommendations should be identified. RMHC-CNI of United States should start future planning like Ronald McDonald House Charities of Australia, who started a “Mission Possible Strategic Plan 2023” on “Impact Report of 2020” (Ronald McDonald House Charities of Australia, 2020). Another great strategy would be focusing on enhancing charitable contributions from recyclable products. It would be a supplement to income that would resolve the environmental crisis by reducing pollution and lowering the costs of products. RMHC-CNI already runs a Pop-Tab recycling program with United Scrap Metal that generates a lot of money (Ronald McDonald House Charities of Chicagoland & Northwest Indiana [j], 2017). Therefore, collaborating with other recyclables like ink cartridges, mobile phones, or plastic can bring down the medical equipment's' cost. This would thrive RMHC-CNI as a sustainable operation in action.

Limitations

Altogether, the efforts of RMHC-CNI display huge accomplishments in tackling critical situations of pandemic. But capturing challenges of COVID-19 pandemic and investigating the coping mechanism is longitudinal research and cannot be encompassed in one study. Moreover, it is correlational and dependable on many variables. The five Ronald McDonald House Charities serve the Chicagoland area to provide support for families with critically ill children and it has become more expensive after pandemic. Volunteers with welcoming smiles and helpful hands are still scarce, even today. Future planning and crucial strategic tactics to bring groundbreaking innovation is needed until it becomes a part of our culture. It is imperative that RMHC-CNI uses transformational innovation to empower collaboration, and plan to make sure that families with critically ill children are not turned away in the future. Therefore, increasing funds is required to maintain financial health.

Conclusion

Lots of consistency, commitment, and coordination is needed to increase funds by approaching state, local, and federal government along with private sectors to support an exceptional cause of keeping families with critically ill children together through Ronald McDonald House Charities of Chicagoland & Northwest Indiana (RMHC-CNI). This research study is focusing on priority problems faced during the COVID-19 pandemic which impacted the financial management and volunteerism of RMHC-CNI, while generative research approach highlights a more complex and productive analysis of core problems of pandemic creating financial deficit. Using renewable energy and recyclables items as charitable contributions in nonprofits would bring productivity in financial management and environmental stability for humanity. Studying the crisis of pandemic and comprehending the problems can avoid future ecological crisis by raising funds for managing financial health of nonprofits.

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