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Virtual Dance Marathon Raises 40,000 in 26.2 Hour Streaming Event

Emma Jaber, Arts & Entertainment Editor

Since 1991, Miracle Network Dance Marathon has raised over \$300 million for Children's Miracle Network Hospitals across the country with the help of colleges and university organizers nationwide. In a year where coming together, let alone to fundraise, has been nearly impossible, Seattle University and the University of Washington (UW) Dance Marathon clubs teamed together to ensure Dance Marathon could still go on to raise money for Miracle kids and their families.

Typically held in the Champion Ballroom for 12 hours, activities are offered to bring Seattle U community members and patients from Seattle Children's hospital together to fundraise. A Twitch stream with live activities, as well as other asynchronous opportunities, stood in place of the traditional format this year.

Although the Twitch format changed the way the event functioned, the fundraising goal was not inhibited by the online environment. Walking away with \$40,000 for Seattle Children's Hospital, organizers were impressed with their success.

Fourth-year Public Affairs and Spanish double major Claire Rodgers is the Executive Director of Seattle U Dance Marathon (SUDM) and was really proud of the team for coming together and putting on the event.

"Despite all the crazy circumstances with COVID-19, I think we easily could have just said, 'Alright, we're not going to do Dance Marathon this year, since we can't do it in person,' but instead, we chose to rise to the occasion and put on a really great event in a virtual setting," Rodgers said.

For Rodgers, working with the UW team made a turbulent year more successful.

"We were both struggling a little bit, so being able to come together and join forces since we're benefiting the same cause, it just seemed like a natural partnership. Getting to work together and have more energy, more people, I think it really helped the morale of the team too," Rodgers said.

Communications Director for the UW Dance Marathon team and Third-year Psychology major Zach Smith got involved with Dance Marathon to work with kids and be part of something bigger than himself.

Smith spoke to some of the preliminary goals the UW team brought to the table this year. Initially before teaming with Seattle U, the UW team had set a fundraising goal of \$31,000 which represents the amount of undergraduate students at UW.



“Being that it was virtual it was definitely a hefty ask and one we tried to take step by step,” Smith said. “After collaborating with Seattle U, and combining our events together, we didn’t specifically discuss a monetary expectation, or an overarching goal, which I thought was honestly kind of beneficial, just because sometimes when you look at that big number, it can become overwhelming and deter from the goals and tasks right in front of you.”

Dance Marathon Communications Director and Seattle U Second-year Biology major Abby Urban, noted some of her apprehension at first with the live stream format, especially because students face prolonged Zoom fatigue as classes remain virtual.

“I think that was one of our biggest decisions to choose Twitch to stream because we’re trying to step away from this whole Zoom world that we’ve created and do something a little bit more fun and different,” Urban said.

Rodgers also spoke to the financial burden that COVID-19 placed on families and individuals, and that she wanted to be mindful of that while fundraising this year.

“A lot of our world obviously is hurting financially because of COVID-19, so being really intentional in who we’re asking and making sure that it’s not always about the money was something that was really important to me,” Urban said. “Yes, we’re trying to fundraise, but it’s more about building relationships and being supportive of one another and not letting the money kind of be the only thing that’s driving our mission.”

For those interested in Dance Marathon, there is room for anyone looking to get involved, even if you don’t see yourself as much of a dancer. Smith wants those interested in joining to know that the organization stands for much more.

“It really purely is about supporting kids and families at Seattle Children’s who need that support. You don’t even need to know how to dance to participate in any of the activities or even the morale dance. It’s just a great opportunity to be part of something that is so much larger than any of us,” Smith said.

Rodgers emphasized that Seattle U is still hiring for executive board positions for the coming year. Students can reach out via email at sudm@seattleu.edu if they are interested in joining or have any questions.

“It’s been an awesome organization for me to work with, so I would encourage anyone to join,” Rodgers said.

In a year of financial uncertainty, these Dance Marathon teams were able to deliver some financial support to Miracle kids and their families through harnessing a sense of collaboration and community online.