

“Broadway, Our Way!” -- Rising Stars, Fresh Fans and a New Reputation for Sister Cities Girlchoir
8. Pro Bono Programs
Simon PR

50-word summary

Thanks to Simon PR’s campaign, Sister Cities Girlchoir’s benefit concert sold out, they’ve received nearly \$20,000 in new funding and interest from prospective choir members has increased 25%. “Our brand recognition has increased significantly,” said its founder. “Most important, what you did helped us fulfill our mission and heighten the quality of service for the girls.”

###

“Broadway, Our Way!” -- Rising Stars, Fresh Fans and a New Reputation for Sister Cities Girlchoir

8. Pro Bono Programs

Simon PR

Program Overview

Alysia Lee is a dynamic classical vocalist with a passion for music and social change. The talented and visionary chanteuse believes that when it comes to making change, girls are the most powerful force on the planet. That’s why she founded Sister Cities Girlchoir (SCG) with a singular vision: empower girls through music. Her program provides a safe space for girls from low-income, high-crime communities in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania and Camden, New Jersey. The program goals: unleash the girls’ potential, building their resilience, leadership, and connection through the arts.

In 2012, Sister City Girlchoir opened at three sites with 75 middle schoolers participating in weekly, tuition-free musical and social skills training. The girls attended workshops on public speaking and etiquette, learned from professional teaching artists, and performed in free community concerts. Within a year, more than 250 girls, ages 6 to 16 had registered.

As Lee planned for 2014, she knew that the SCG season-ending fundraising concert, called “Broadway, Our Way,” could be pivotal: an opportunity to build its reputation and gain new patrons, partners and participants. Lee had launched a successful program, but lacked the know-how and resources to take it to the next level. Then she met Simon PR and completed the Agency’s pro bono application. SCG’s mission of empowering girls appealed to Agency president Lisa Simon, a strong supporter of the arts and women-owned businesses. Simon knew that with just a few strategic activities, the Agency could bring SCG the wide visibility it needed and deserved.

Goal: “We want to increase our brand recognition, event recognition and event attendance,” Lee wrote in the application. “The more widely known the program is, the more kids we can reach.”

Objectives

- Sell 700 tickets to its season-ending fundraising concert.
- Expand SCG’s audience beyond friends and family of choir members.
- Build SCG’s reputation by securing two major feature stories—one in print and one on television.

Target Audiences

- Members of the public in the Greater Philadelphia region, especially those interested in arts and culture.
- Key members of the regional media.

Budget: Simon PR’s time for planning and execution was offered pro bono, with a budget of \$10,000 in service.

Research

Simon PR consulted SCG’s annual report to learn about the fledgling non-profit’s mission, history and program details. That foundational research was followed by an in-person interview with founder Alysia Lee to gain understanding into her vision, her goals and her motivation. Simon PR also consulted Lee about the group’s typical audience base and goals for growth. Finally, the Agency attended a pre-benefit concert party to gain some additional insight.

Strategies

- Target reporters who offer in-depth coverage of positive community action and who focus on inspiring, human interest stories.
- Secure advance calendar placements in online and print media in Philadelphia and beyond.

Tactics

To identify the print targets with the greatest potential and impact, Simon PR read feature stories of leading reporters at *The Philadelphia Inquirer* and *Philadelphia Daily News*, the City's two daily newspapers. The top target: Helen Ubinas, a *Daily News* columnist who writes about girls and their potential to overcome violence and poverty. The top TV target: CBS3's "Brotherly Love," a weekly television feature that showcases good people doing good things in Philadelphia, the City of Brotherly Love.

Simon PR wrote a backgrounder on SCG and cover pitches that outlined the powerful work of a program that believes "a song can change a girl, a girl can change the world." The pitches detailed individual choir members and how the program has changed their lives, putting a human face on the story. They also invited reporters to attend rehearsals, to see Lee working her magic and to gather visuals and sound for in-depth coverage.

A calendar alert with an adorable photo of the youngest SCG participants was the simple, effective tool needed to secure advanced placements across the region.

Results

The calendar listing appeared in more than a dozen key newspapers and online sites across the region. Among them: the far-reaching philly.com (web portal for *The Philadelphia Inquirer* and *Daily News*), PhillyFunGuide, a channel of the Greater Philadelphia Cultural Alliance which reaches 100,000 culture-lovers, and four top daily newspaper sites: the *Daily Times* (Delaware County), *Daily Local News* (Chester County), *Courier Post* (South Jersey) and *The Trentonian* (Trenton, NJ).

Five days before the concert, CBS3 aired a heartwarming, three-minute Brotherly Love segment featuring rehearsal footage and interviews with Lee and several girls. Producer Teresa Nazario tweeted "I loved meeting the girls. Their songs are still going through my head." That was retweeted by popular Philadelphia CBS anchor Ukee Washington, who introduced the story on air.

Two days later, the *Daily News'* Helen Ubinus started tweeting photos and video of the girls rehearsing to promote her upcoming column. In it, she called Lee a "firecracker of a founder . . . who launched a movement." Ubinus' final tweet was a photo of a note she received from *Daily News* managing editor Mike Days. "Love this column," he wrote.

Days was not alone. The earned media had tremendous impact. For its first benefit concert in 2013, SCG struggled to fill a 200-seat space. This year, the concert sold out, exceeding its 700 ticket goal by 120 tickets. Potential ticket buyers were turned away days before the concert.

Since the concert, Lee has been honored at City Hall, and SCG received grants totaling \$19,000 from two new funders. Requests for information from prospective choir members has increased 25%. The non-profit was also awarded the 75th Anniversary Award from The Presser Foundation, which will sponsor an upcoming program. "We are thrilled to be in the ranks with other awardees like the Philadelphia Orchestra and the Curtis Institute of Music," Lee wrote.

"The PR campaign is now a compelling piece in our grant proposal package. Our brand recognition has increased significantly and that has helped us recruit more participants and attract highly-qualified staff. Most important, it has helped us to fulfill our mission and heightened the quality of services we will be able to offer in the future."