

# Chapter 18

## Nonprofits

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### ABSTRACT

*This chapter will guide the reader through the development and growth of a community-based nonprofit organization with a sustainable approach to the initial core values. This chapter serves as an informed roadmap for clinicians interested in pursuing the development of their own nonprofit. Working with children of adult patients will serve as the backdrop to highlight the concepts of the development and trajectory of the organization; the extrapolation of the process and skills to other populations will be addressed. The longitudinal experience of Wonders & Worries has afforded the organization the opportunity to learn many lessons and develop solid evidence-based practices in relation to clinical offerings coupled with overall organizational growth and strength. This chapter will provide the concepts, examples, and guidance to encourage sustainable child life programming in a variety of community settings supporting children and families.*

### INTRODUCTION

There is a multitude of significant life challenges affecting children within the community that can be supported through a community-based nonprofit agency. Certified Child Life Specialists (CCLS) often possess the clinical skills to address these support needs. However, they may not have the background knowledge, experience, and business acumen to start a nonprofit organization.

This chapter uses and expands on the growth and development of Wonders & Worries; a nonprofit agency initially highlighted in *Beyond the Hospital* (Cooper & Hicks, 2008). Wonders & Worries is a Texas-based nonprofit agency providing support to families coping with parental illness. The focus of this chapter will be on evidence-based practices and the sustainability of a nonprofit over time.

Case examples from Wonders & Worries will be shared to provide a frame of reference for consideration for those seeking to develop a unique organization to meet the needs of their community. The process

## ***Nonprofits***

from conception and initiation to sustainability well into the future is highlighted. Critical questions for the reader to consider regarding goals to begin formulating action steps are shared throughout the chapter.

## **HISTORY OF WONDERS AND WORRIES**

The founders connected in the Spring of 1999 to initiate the creation of Wonders & Worries. The needs assessment and qualitative experience of an unmet need and emerging research documenting the validity of this need provided the catalyst for the inception of Wonders & Worries. From the initial phone conversation, the two realized they shared a vision and deep awareness of the need for child life support for children when it was the parent who had the illness. This innovation and vision in the professional community of child life provided great insight into children's current and future needs. At the time of the development of this program, child life services focused on a child and their family who encountered the healthcare environment. The two founders met, beginning with an evaluation of the need to initiate a community-based organization.

The first step in this process was determining if the entity would be a private practice with associated fees or a nonprofit that did not charge client families for services. The founders determined to focus on the creation of a nonprofit largely due to the recognition that most families with a serious diagnosis had financial uncertainty, often with an increase in financial burdens. The founders' desire to have services accessible to all propelled this business model. Furthermore, the established professional contacts and resources between the two founders were significant to this nonprofit's beginning and ongoing development.

Fortuitous timing and an established professional relationship allowed Wonders & Worries to have a significant initial funder to launch this dynamic model. The initial Wonders & Worries business was small, with just two employees. The two founders worked out of one office and performed all the functions of the nonprofit, from program delivery to community outreach of services and paying bills. The funding allocated was 30 hours of work a week for both child life specialists. Through the development of the nonprofit, the skills needed to initiate, maintain, and grow a nonprofit were identified.

Over time additional employees were hired as funding and needs grew. Office locations expanded and grew both to reach different segments of the population (e.g., bilingual services) and ease commute times for client families. At this time, this community-based nonprofit has grown from a two Certified Child Life Specialist woman-owned and run nonprofit organization to a nonprofit organization that has over 7 physical sites, multiple employees, and dozens of Wonders & Worries providers throughout the United States. The initial budget upon inception was \$120,000 per year and is now well over one and a half million dollars annually. Most noteworthy in 2022 is that over 13,000 individuals have been served since the inception of Wonders & Worries in 2001.

## **NEEDS ASSESSMENT AND CHILD LIFE RATIONALE**

Why begin a community-based nonprofit? How does an individual initiate services and make them successful? This question often results from recognizing an unmet need in the community. Three components of a multifaceted needs assessment are: identifying an unmet need, having the skills to meet the need, and having the personal drive and passion to take action. These three things are required to begin the journey to creating a nonprofit agency.

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