

WFWP Billings, MT: How to Plan a Successful Yard Sale

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From left to right, Fusako, Lee, Kimiko, Marguerite and our neighbor

Editor's note: Through strategic planning and adequate support, any WFWP chapter can run a successful yard sale fundraiser in their community. Here to share some best practices from their own experience is the WFWP Billings, Montana chapter, which recently put on a yard sale to benefit the Schools of Africa (SOA) that exceeded all expectations: "We got help from more people than anticipated, received donations of wonderful things, people's time and advertising, and made much more money for SOA than we expected!" said Marguerite Felig, WFWP Montana chapter representative.

It all started with picking the right date. In early June, Astrid Woods, one of the WFWP members in Billings, suggested that we put together a yard sale in July for the Schools of Africa. She's enjoyed going to yard sales for years, and has organized them herself. Our core

WFWP team looked at dates, and we chose July 19 and 20. It was a time most of us would be available to help with the sale, there was enough time to acquire donations and there would be a combination Mexican Fiesta and a Classic Car Show in the park a block away from our yard sale.

The most important parts of any yard sale are appealing items to sell and people to help. We planned to ask people for donations of furniture and popular household items, kids strollers, car seats, and sports equipment. It was decided that used clothing, except for gently used baby and kid's clothes, was too hard to display. I also wanted to have some Silent Auction Items to mix things up and make it more fun.



Don't forget to look for opportunities! If you know anyone who has had their own business, or people who are moving or downsizing at home, they often clean out some nice items, and they can donate things that draw people and make a yard sale successful. Be sure to ask around, and let people know what's happening and when.

We were fortunate to be on the receiving end of some lovely donations. One family in Billings connected to WFWP, the Martins, was downsizing as well as getting ready for their newly married son and daughter-in-law to move in with them. They had many great items which they generously contributed, including an antique aluminum 12-pack Nehi soda carrier. Astrid Woods had recently done some organizing at home, and their family also had lots of great items to donate to the sale. Kimiko Dilorenzo was able to collect designer handbags, a wicker settee with two chairs and a nice refrigerator from friends. She brought her daughters Elissa and Anna to help with the sale, too!

Some of the flyers distributed in our neighborhood drew in substantial donations, as well. This brings me to the topic of advertising and finding various avenues of support. Our beautiful computer-designed flyer was made by Ilse, a friend-of-a-friend, at no cost, and it was a great way to get the word out. A neighborhood girl volunteered her help in the mornings after I showed the flyer to her mom.

One of our new WFWP friends assists in volunteer projects through her church, and she had some good suggestions. She entered our yard sale information into the justserve.org website that enables organizations to post calls for volunteers, and that was a valuable opportunity to advertise. Through this experience, I learned that the earlier this is done, the better.

We also got some help from Astrid's husband, Clint, who posted ads and a donation request on Facebook Marketplace and Craig's List. Ads in the newspaper can be good, too.

Two young men, Jehremy and Lee, put up signs advertising the yard sale the night before it started. These signs had been prepared by Akalia, another volunteer. About 10 signs were placed along major roads and the streets near our yard sale. The signs only had the address on them, so we can reuse them again next year.

Setting up an attractive display on the day of the yard sale matters. Fanny Smith, the SOA Coordinator for WFWP, suggested decorating tables with African print fabrics, and said that having some nice pictures of SOA on display would spark buyers' interest and desire to help. Having a supply of SOA pamphlets on hand is also a good idea. Some people will read them and hopefully come back to help next year's sale!

Think about how many volunteers you need, both for preparations and the day of. Astrid bought price stickers and signs a week before the sale, and we spent a couple of hours getting everything priced that same Sunday. Of course, we had to do more pricing later, but most of it was done before the yard sale. Two of us went door-to-door with flyers asking for donations, and inviting neighbors to come for the sale a week or so before it happened.

For set up and take down early in the morning and at the end of the day, we had help from several able-bodied volunteers - Paul Dilorenzo, Lee and Jehremy lent us their muscles - but it was more than enough to have five people sell during most of the day. If there are many heavy items, you may need one strong person and a dolly all day long.

Some really unexpected and funny things can happen when you have a yard sale. The wife of a local pastor had donated a box of toys and a purse, but when she stopped by, she realized she had placed some of her favorite coin purses in the large purse, and discovered loose change, old IDs and some expired store cards. She was surprised, but jovially donated the change, took the cards with her and bought back the coin purses! We all laughed with her about her mistake, and were happy she kept her IDs and cards safe. After that I looked through the other purses.

Another learning experience touched on the soda carrier I wrote about earlier: I wasn't sure if it would sell at the price it was worth, and I put quite a high price on it. A man came and took a picture of it to send to his wife. Then, he asked to make a deal for far less than the tagged price. The final price we agreed on was what I knew the item was worth, and I was happy to have a person who appreciated its value purchase the carrier.

After the sale we counted up the till, and it came to \$680. That was much more than we had thought we could make. The gratitude we feel for that team effort has made our relationships and commitment to WFWP stronger. We wanted to offer a substantial amount to Schools of Africa, and we did it! Next year, we'll be able to improve on what was accomplished this year, I believe. With that gratitude in mind, I wrote thank you cards and sent emails to everyone who donated, advertised and worked at the yard sale who helped us meet and exceed our goals.

Best wishes with your own Schools of Africa yard sale! It was a great experience for us, although we were all tired at the end. We got to know people in the neighborhood, and enjoyed telling our customers they were donating to benefit children, their families and communities in Africa.