"Raise a Little Hell with SeriousFun"
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Giving kids a chance to “raise a little hell” was one of the goals of Hollywood icon Paul Newman, and this quote is on shirts worn by Phi Kappa Tau members at national events. Phi Kappa Tau Fraternity’s national philanthropy is The SeriousFun Children’s Network. Founded by Phi Kappa Tau alumnus Paul Newman in 1988, SeriousFun Children's Network is a growing global community of 30 camps and programs serving children with serious illnesses and their families, always free of charge. Since opening, the camps have delivered more than 1.1 million experiences to children and their families from more than 50 countries. The first camp was The Hole in the Wall Gang Camp, named after a reference to Newman’s film “Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid.” Each year, Phi Kappa Tau’s summer leadership academy sessions engage members with our philanthropy by having a SeriousFun lunch at each of the sessions. This helps to remind us why we do what we do at Phi Kappa Tau.

When given a cause to rally behind, young men will dive into philanthropic efforts. Members are looking to get involved and be philanthropically engaged, and this is what The SeriousFun Children’s Network has done for Phi Kappa Tau Fraternity members. Working with the kids is the best part of volunteering at a camp. Seeing the kids flourish is a feeling like none other. Fraternity men get to see where the money they raise goes and they get to participate in the camp experience with kids. According to Dr. Laurie Browne and Rob Warner (2019), SeriousFun camp alumni ages 18-25 shared that they appreciated diversity, living in the moment, perseverance, confidence in self, and a strong sense of identity. The SeriousFun alumni learned these traits at camp and have brought them into their daily adult lives.

Since the COVID-19 outbreak, all of the in-person sessions at camps around the world have been cancelled for the summer. Over the last couple of weeks, there has been announcement after announcement that kids will not be at camp during summer 2020. The magic of camp will have to be transferred from the typical experience to an at home magic. This has provided an opportunity for Phi Kappa Tau members to step up and see how they can now be involved philanthropically to support kids in a different way. Everything collegiate Phi Kappa Tau members knew about spring philanthropic events changed. There was a town hall Zoom meeting held by Phi Kappa Tau executive offices, and one of the big topics was how to still give back to SeriousFun. This has provided an opportunity for members to evaluate how they will still be able to contribute financially. Chapters have been able to raise money using social media while still being socially distant from each other. Some chapters have donated the funds they were going to use to put on in-person philanthropy events and have donated it to SeriousFun. At press time, SeriousFun
camps are working on strategies to bring camp to the kids. One camp has made “at-home camp kits” and mailed them to kids who would have been at camp this summer.

The connection with Paul Newman and Phi Kappa Tau helps the brotherhood understand why the national philanthropy is The SeriousFun Children’s Network. The Phi Kappa Tau Fraternity Foundation provides funds for brothers to travel to a camp and volunteer onsite. The fraternity aims to remove possible barriers for brothers to volunteer and give their time back. At Phi Kappa Tau Conclave every year, there is the SeriousFun-A-Thon, a philanthropic event the executive offices hosts for the Oxford, Ohio community. The goal is to get Conclave participants involved in hosting a successful philanthropic event for SeriousFun and take the model back to their home chapters.

When working with students on campus, ask why their cause is their national philanthropy. There is a reason organizations select their philanthropy, and when collegiate members understand the reason, it is easier for them to build a personal connection and get behind it. What can be done to help undergraduate members connect with their chapter’s philanthropies? This is where our work as fraternity/professionals can help undergraduates connect to their philanthropies. Personal connection is key. Our philanthropic missions should not only be a selling point during the recruitment process but explained during different parts of membership. By senior year of membership, each member should have an understanding on what their philanthropy stands for. Contact the national office for the philanthropy and ask for promotional materials so the chapter may showcase them. Having a virtual meeting with a representative or someone who is directly impacted by philanthropic cause will help make a connection between the chapter and philanthropy. Each time we reach out to SeriousFun, they have always provided us with materials to further the mission of the organization so undergraduate members have what they need to explain SeriousFun to people who attend events. Philanthropy is woven into the fabric of fraternal organizations. The current state of the world will show the ongoing need for the support that comes from fraternities and sororities.

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Guillermo Flores is the associate director for fraternity & sorority life at Michigan State University. He works to ensure there are a variety of voices at the national level when it comes to fraternity/sorority advising. Guillermo is the AFA Region III Director. With his work as a volunteer for the SeriousFun Children’s Network, it is a goal of his to get more brothers of Phi Kappa Tau involved in their national philanthropy. Guillermo works to change the world, make people smile, and get lost in pop culture. Follow along on Instagram: @GuillermoxF.
Resources

About SeriousFun Children’s Network

Browne, L. and Warner, R. (2019, January) ACA’s Youth Impact Study. ACAcamps.org
https://www.acacamps.org/resource-library/camping-magazine/acas-youth-impact-study

https://support.seriousfun.org/document.doc?id=542