

These Events Are a Doorway, Not a Finish Line



From the outside, BOO!Dat504 and WinterFest504 may look like two big holiday celebrations. Families come out, children enjoy activities, neighbors share a meal, and the community has a good time. All of that matters. But the real story is what happens before the gates open and what continues long after the decorations come down.

For IMPACT504, these events are one of the ways we show families who we are. We show up consistently. We create something safe, joyful, and high quality. We listen. We keep our word. We make room for children to be celebrated and for parents to connect without feeling judged or pressured. Over time, those experiences build trust.

That kind of trust cannot be created with a flyer, a social media post, or a one-time giveaway. It grows through repeated, face-to-face relationships. National research reflects what we see locally: 69% of people say they are more likely to trust nonprofits that work directly in their neighborhoods.¹

Our recent summer camp is a strong example. Part of the reason demand was so high is that families already knew IMPACT504. They had seen us deliver. They had watched how we treated children and neighbors. The holiday events helped establish a reputation as a genuine, dependable community partner, and that reputation carried into our year-round programming.

A Big Stage Where Children Can Shine



Children need more than activities. They need chances to be seen.

The BOO!Dat504 costume contest, Christmas Carol"oke, performance opportunities, and activity zones give young people a place to show creativity, courage, personality, and talent. For some children, it may be the first time they have performed in front of a large crowd, entered a contest, won a prize, or heard an entire community cheer for them.

Those moments tell a child: Your ideas matter. Your talent deserves attention. Your community is proud of you.

A stage can build confidence, but it can also change how a child sees what is possible. Community-based arts research finds that participants often connect these experiences with friendship, purpose, personal development, and future opportunity.³

A Place for Families to Create, Connect, and Be Inspired



Our youth arts and crafts and STEM activities with STEM NOLA are not simply something to keep children busy. They give children access to materials, guidance, and encouragement. They also give parents and caregivers an easy way to sit beside a child, create something together, and share a positive moment.

In communities where families are often navigating financial pressure, transportation barriers, limited enrichment options, and daily stress, a well-resourced creative experience can mean a great deal. A child gets to imagine, make choices, complete a project, and proudly show it to someone who matters.

Research from the National Endowment for the Arts connects participation in the arts with positive social-emotional and academic outcomes. Community arts research also points to lasting benefits involving creativity, caring relationships, personal growth, workplace skills, and future pathways.^{2 3}

That is why we view every arts & craft table as more than an activity. It can be the first step toward a workshop, a summer program, a volunteer opportunity, or a longer relationship with a caring adult.

Making Nearby Resources Truly Accessible



Gert Town and Hollygrove are home to nonprofits, institutions, service providers, and community programs. Yet being located in a neighborhood does not automatically mean an organization has a real relationship with the people who live there.

Many families do not know what services are available, whether they qualify, whom to call, or whether they will be treated with respect. Too often, organizations have only surface-level contact with the community around them.

Our Community Resource Fair and Health Fair help close that gap. We bring organizations into a trusted, familiar environment where families are already gathered. A resource table becomes more than a stack of brochures. It can become a conversation, a referral, an appointment, or an ongoing relationship.

This matters in a city where roughly one in three children lives in poverty, more than twice the national rate. Economic hardship can create continuing stress around food, housing, transportation, safety, and family schedules.⁴ When services are easier to find and relationships are easier to begin, families have a better chance of receiving support before a challenge becomes a crisis.

Youth Help Build the Events and Earn While They Learn



Young people are not only guests at these events. They help make the events possible.

Youth can take part in planning, promotion, setup, operations, performance, and breakdown. They can distribute flyers, serve as House of Screams actors, assist vendors, guide guests, manage activity areas, support logistics, and help solve real-time problems.

- They learn to arrive on time and be accountable to a team.
- They practice communication, customer service, and problem-solving.
- They see how a large community event is planned and operated.
- They earn money and receive guidance on how to manage it.
- They begin building a work history, references, and confidence.

These opportunities are especially important because young people from lower-income households have less access to early employment. One national evidence review found an employment rate of 61% among young people ages 16 to 24 in households above 200% of the federal poverty level, compared with 39% among those at or below that line. The same research notes that early employment can build soft skills, work history, and connections to employer networks.⁵

The U.S. Department of Labor also describes youth employment as a way to put earnings into young people's hands, build workplace skills, encourage academic progress, and reduce youth involvement in crime.⁶ Through these events, the neighborhood itself becomes a workforce classroom.

Meeting Basic Needs With Quality and Dignity



WinterFest504's 12-Month Adopt-A-Family component and Krewe de Charité clothing, coat, shoe, and essentials giveaways provide immediate relief during a costly time of year. But the value goes beyond the number of items distributed.

A high-quality coat, a pair of properly fitting shoes, new clothing, or household essentials can free up money for rent, utilities, groceries, medicine, and transportation. Those items can lower stress, help a child feel prepared for school, and give families room to breathe.

We are intentional about quality because dignity matters. Families should not be expected to accept items that no one else would want. When children receive clothing and essentials they can feel good wearing and using, the support meets a basic need while also building confidence.

Serving a Full Meal Is Part of the Mission



We also provide high-quality, delicious, and healthy full meals at both events. In Gert Town and Hollygrove, where access to full-service grocery stores is limited, a complete meal is not a small add-on. It is part of caring for the whole family.

The New Orleans Health Department reports that 70,030 residents, or 18.6% of Orleans Parish, experience food insecurity. Children and older adults are among those at greatest risk.⁷ Recent local reporting also places child food insecurity at nearly one in three.⁸

When families can sit down and enjoy a good meal together, they can participate in the event without worrying about buying food on-site or leaving early to feed the family. That meal also allows limited household food resources to stretch a little further.

Food communicates welcome. A full plate says that families deserve care, quality, and hospitality, not just access to a program.

The IMPACT Continues All Year



The easiest numbers to count are attendance, meals, costumes, gifts, vendors, and resource tables. We should count them. But they are not the full measure of success.

The deeper IMPACT shows up when:

- A family returns for summer camp or another IMPACT504 program.
- A child discovers confidence after performing on stage.
- A young person comes back as a paid worker, volunteer, or leader.
- A parent calls because trust has already been established.
- A resource provider develops a real neighborhood partnership.
- A household has more money available for rent, food, medicine, or utilities because essential items were provided.
- A child stays connected to caring adults and positive opportunities throughout the year.

BOO!Dat504 and WinterFest504 are much bigger than one-day events. They are community-building platforms. They allow IMPACT504 to earn trust through action, celebrate children, connect families to resources, create paid youth opportunities, meet immediate needs with dignity, and turn a holiday gathering into the beginning of a lasting relationship.

BOO!Dat504 and WinterFest504 use the power of holiday celebration to create year-round pathways to trust, youth leadership, creative expression, family stability, nutritious food, essential resources, and ongoing community engagement.





Sources

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