NAME OF PROJECT: SMILE GAMES

TOTAL HOURS OF SERVICE GIVEN BY MEMBERS: 8 committee members volunteering approx. 10 hours each (80 total for the committee)

ACTIVE MEMBERSHIP OF CHAPTER:

NUMBER OF MEMBERS PARTICIPATING: 10-15

PURPOSE OF PROJECT: To provide a unique day geared toward children with special needs. Offering adapted games and sports activities in which they might otherwise be unable to participate, the "Smile Games" serves those often overlooked within our community – children who are at the heart of Junior Auxiliary's mission to provide services to underserved populations. The hope is that the "Smile Games" will become an annual event.

COST OF PROJECT: approx. $1,000

The Junior Auxiliary of Brookhaven has a long history of helping to address the needs of children with disabilities in our community. In the early 1960s, our chapter paid the salary for one
of the very first special education teachers in the state of Mississippi. The chapter has always gone
above and beyond in helping to meet the needs of all children in our community, including those
that face extraordinary challenges. In fact, for many years the chapter assisted with the Special
Olympics program in our area, and also hosted the Very Special People Day (VIP) at the local
amusement park for special needs children and adults.

This year, our Community Assistance committee decided to look back at our history and
revive a legacy project by once again assisting a special group of children in a big way. Members felt
that those with special needs are often overlooked in our community and therefore merit more
attention by Junior Auxiliary. After an initial committee meeting, it was decided to create an event-
tailored around special Olympics type activities on a smaller scale just for children with special
needs – "The Smile Games". It would be a fun-filled day dedicated just to these children, as we
found that they are often not included on school field trips. After meeting with the Special
Education directors from both school districts in our community, it was decided that the event
should be held on a school day so that every child would have the necessary transportation to get
them to the event.
Initial planning began prior to the beginning of the school year, as the committee members created fun events that would be included during the Smile Games. The challenge was developing games that would be appropriate for all children, including those with multiple physical disabilities. Five game centers were planned with each center representing a color from the Olympic rings. Games included tennis, bean bag toss, tug-of-war, basketball, and a relay game. All games could be easily modified to make it possible for any children to participate.
Our committee devoted several months to planning the "Smile Games." We wanted to ensure that each child felt special – and everyone felt like a winner at the end of the day. A committee member designed a T-shirt just for the participants and they were sent home prior to the "Smile Games" so that every child could wear their "uniform" on their way to the games. Every child received a medal and they each got to hold the "torch" at the conclusion of the Games. As it was a school day, lunch was also provided for all participants and our many volunteers.

The Community Assistance Committee, which has eight members, was responsible for the planning and execution of this event. Several other active members also assisted in the preparation phase, the night-before set up, and during the actual event. We were also thrilled by the overwhelming number of student volunteers we received from area schools.

Our vision for this event was to have a day in which these children would feel special, and each of them would feel like a winner. We are so grateful that feedback we received from the teachers, students, and family members was that we more than accomplished this. They told us that this was the best event their child had ever attended.

We learned so much from this event and these children taught us more than they will ever know. We met a need in these children’s lives as we gave them a day that was completely devoted to them; a day where they felt like winners in all aspects of life.

Smiles beamed on all the children’s faces throughout the day. But, our JA members, volunteers, teachers, and parents were also beaming with excitement for the participants.
Due to the success of this event, many parents and teachers asked if we could do this event again. Our initial plans were to make this an annual event; however, many parents and teachers were so enthusiastic about the outcome of it, that they have asked if it would be possible to make it bi-annual. Our committee will continue to work with the Special Education departments and parents of these children in efforts to plan a winter and summer "Smile Games" event in the upcoming year.

Just as our members did nearly a half-century ago, it is an amazing to see how our vision has become a project that can have a lasting impact on the lives of these precious children for many years to come!