

Client: Sweetwater Spectrum

BUILDING LEADERSHIP FOR CAMPAIGN SUCCESS

Sweetwater Spectrum was the brainchild of several visionary families with autistic children that were facing difficult and often heartbreaking challenges. Among them were isolation and finding a quality residential supported-living alternative for their children who were approaching young adulthood. Autism is a disorder of epidemic proportions affecting nearly one in 88 children born in California.

The challenge

There are few residential communities in the US specifically geared to young adults with autism. Wait lists for these programs can be more than 15 years. The founders of Sweetwater Spectrum came together and, as volunteers, founded a new organization to develop California's first such residential community.

After locating a suitable property for its campus in Sonoma, California, they set out to develop a program and design a facility specifically for the needs of autistic young adults.

The task was daunting. To do it right Sweetwater Spectrum would have to initially raise \$6 million, and an additional \$4 million, once land was purchased and construction began. And while the need was there, Sweetwater was a start-up — they had no staff, no service track record and no longstanding donor base.

The solution

Sweetwater Spectrum had heard of PRG's reputation for major gifts fundraising and experience working with other developmentally disabled-serving capital campaigns, most recently the \$13 million campaign for the Cedars of Marin.

PRG first helped to create a fundraising strategy and messaging platform. Then we worked with Sweetwater's founders to recruit a capital campaign leadership team focused on "Founders Circle" commitments of \$1 million and greater.

All the while, the PRG team provided consultation to help build the Sweetwater Spectrum organization — its Board, initial staff and program framework. PRG provided hands-on support to Sweetwater's leaders, developing customized strategies for each Founders Circle donor prospect.

The result

The campaign achieved its initial \$6 million goal through its Founders Circle donors, which led to a Phase II campaign. Also designed by PRG, the second go-round raised an additional \$3.8 million to complete the project.

Sweetwater Spectrum opened in 2013 and is now fully operational. They have become a model for services to adults with autism, and were recently featured in the New York Times as a programmatic and architectural answer to the autism epidemic that's affecting US communities.

Mark Jackson, founding chair of Sweetwater Spectrum said, "Hiring PRG was simply genius on our part."

To learn more about Sweetwater Spectrum visit sweetwaterspectrum.org.