



**Recognizing:** Chuhak & Tecson, P.C.

**Project Title:** Women Helping Women

Women Helping Women is an after-hours professional gathering that packs a three-for-one punch: networking, business development and community service in a single event. WHW benefits not only attendees but the community as well.

Designed by women for women, our annual Mix-and-Mingles bring together local women business leaders, entrepreneurs and strategic partners for wine and hors d'oeuvres, business and philanthropy. Everyone wins!

For 2 hours, women gather, develop relationships, nurture business, relish in being talented, and serve the community by donating to a not for profit organization selected for that evening's spotlight. The concept was born from the recognition that Chuhak & Tecson (C&T) has talented women attorneys who can attract clients from women business owners, women decision makers, women with buying power, and women strategic partners-a market into which the firm had not yet specifically tapped. It's also true that women tend to network differently than men, through bonding experiences. There is a deep-seated desire to build fundamental trust; women want to know the other person, often well, before doing business. But between home and office, women have many layers of responsibility and not a lot of time to take clients to dinner or get a drink after work. It's also very true that women love to help others: family, friends, community. It's part of their fabric and taps into their soul.

With all this in mind, our women attorneys created an after-work networking/business-building/philanthropic event located close to both major train stations and ending at 7 pm-in time for women to get home and live their personal lives. Attendance is tracked but not required; we want participants to feel no pressure to come every time. It's all about supporting them in their lives, not creating yet another commitment. We have found this particular aspect is most appealing to our audience-so much so that many group members send donations for the charity even when they can't attend the event.

#### **Our core objectives**

.Boost awareness that C&T has women attorneys experienced in handling a wide range of legal work-and that the firm is growing its women associates to principals, its principals to shareholders, and supporting their unique marketing efforts

.Create awareness among external women attorneys that the firm champions diversity, along with a balanced commitment to clients and endorsement of family-providing an atmosphere for women to reach career goals without sacrificing personal needs

.Assist attorneys who find little time to devote to business development; having a structured outlet like WHW helps meet their marketing goals with less time investment than individual endeavors can take. This team approach to marketing is intended to increase revenue while minimizing non-billable time commitments.

.Uplift women we work with, know and want to know, building and strengthening relationships that lead to business development



- .Create opportunity for the combined efforts of many to impact a single not for profit
- .Covering all costs so the not for profit goes home with all the goodies
- .Enable the not for profits to network and sell themselves at each event, garnering new supporters, board members and friends

### **Our accomplishments**

- .From Nov. 2009 to May 2016, WHW has generated over \$285,000 in revenue for C&T women attorneys.
- .Our initial \$1,000 investment for the first Mix-and-Mingle has grown to an average of \$6,900 per event- for a total of \$96,000 to host 14 mixers.
- .The guest list has grown from 200 to over 1,000; we keep blank nametags on hand for all the women who arrive with other guests!
- .An average of 74 attended events in the first 3 years; during the second 3 we've averaged 134.
- .Guests represent more than 40 industries and capitalize on cross-industry strategic partnerships.
- .An ongoing cycle of referrals has been established.
- .There is goodwill among our audiences that cannot be quantified.
- .Thousands of donations in the form of goods, cash and gift cards have benefited our not for profit partners.

### **Our community impact**

The most rewarding part of Women Helping Women has been the gift of working with not for profits serving diverse populations of women or women and their children, and sharing these organizations with our guests. At each event, one of our women principals talks a bit about WHW and the evening's community service cause, then introduces the organization's speaker-sometimes the executive director, but often a client who has been successfully served. And what a powerful message our women receive! We've been moved to tears-and to action. In many cases, our guests later become board members or find other ways to donate time and expertise to our not for profit partners.

Through our events, we have collected and donated thousands of gift items and thousands of dollars in cash and gift cards. Some of our 14 charity partners:

- .Chicago Metropolitan Battered Women's Network, focusing on education and outreach programs to fight domestic violence. We collected personal hygiene products for women who have fled home to shelters, often with only the clothes on their backs.
- .Grace House, a residential program that provides counseling and support services to help newly released female prisoners get on their feet. We collected new pajamas, robes and slippers.
- .New Moms, serving at-risk young mothers and their children. WHW hosted a baby shower, collecting all the kinds of things a new mother needs for her baby.
- .The Dress for Success Closet at Volunteers of America of Illinois, which provides dressy clothing for women veterans, some of whom are homeless. We gathered clothing and accessories one would need to dress for a job interview.
- .Young Women's Leadership Charter School, because girls in grades 7 to 12 perform better in math, science and technology in a single-sex environment. We collected a variety of school supplies and cash donations.



.The Night Ministry's Interim Program. We received bedding, kitchen supplies, personal care items and clothing for this program offering longer-term housing and social services for homeless youth.

.Jewish Child & Family Services, providing therapeutic and support services for people of all backgrounds. WHW collected multicultural and diverse ability dolls to help with trauma therapy, serve as gifts, and comfort children entering the foster care system.

.All God's People-The Boutique, which serves women trying to make a new life for themselves after being trafficked, prostituted or homeless. We collected clothing and accessories for work and social occasions.

And, as if WHW wasn't special enough already...There is always something uniquely special at each WHW event-special for our guests, for our not for profit partners, for our employees. We want women to have that "wow" moment when they enter the room; we often are able to accomplish that with a warm welcome and our decor.

With 14 events so far, we've learned a thing or two about making them special. Some highlights:

.With venue staff, we create a signature "C-Tini" (C&T martini) and sometimes customize appetizers as well to match the theme.

.We always hold a fishbowl drawing. Participants put their business card in and pull another out, calling the woman later for coffee or lunch. Each person makes a call and each receives one, meeting two new prospects in the process.

.For CMBWN, which serves women fleeing abuse, we asked each attendee to bring a lovely piece of jewelry. At the event, guests filled goody bags from the thousands of personal care items donated, wrote inspiring notes for recipients, and tied the notes to the bags, along with the jewelry.

.For one event we asked each woman to identify her "superpower" word and wear it next to her nametag. The speaker challenged attendees to brag on themselves: find another woman, talk about each other's superpower, and then brag, brag, brag!

.Honoring clients of a not for profit, we asked them to create artwork to decorate the event spotlighting that agency.

.Originally, we decorated our events with flowers. Now, we feel that money is better spent on more gifts for the not for profit-donations directly from the firm. To decorate, we ask for early donations from employees and arrange these gifts in creative ways. It's amazing how lovely a centerpiece can be that's made of school supplies!

So, how has this worked out for our guests?

We have myriad examples of ways that WHW has led to new business, including:

.Three times now, C&T has used the services of a guest we met through WHW.

.Two women introduced through our fishbowl drawing two years ago continue to be part of each other's network circles; this connection also led to other relationships for one woman.

.A guest met a fashion consultant and later purchased from her clothing line.

.A wealth advisor went home with requests for long-term care policies from one guest and possible referrals from another.

.An accountant we met was seen to be a good resource for the firm and agreed to serve as a financial



expert at a future event; she also went home with client referrals.

.One of our best stories exemplifies the generous spirit of the WHW community. It was our first mixer. Guest A met Guest B; both are in the same line of work. Later on, A met C, who happened to be looking for the type of service that both A and B offer. But A felt C could be better served by the expertise of B and introduced them, resulting in a relationship still in existence today.

We knew when we launched WHW that we were onto something special-something unique.