

Recap

Walk for Change Event

Blog by Samantha-Jo,

FAST Social Media Specialist

I have to start out by saying how excited I am to be writing this. I have wanted to do a blog for a long time, and now here we are. My name is Samantha-Jo and I'm the Social Media Specialist for FAST, which gives me a unique perspective into the events and "behind the scenes" action that takes place. But I'm also, probably a lot like you. Maybe you've never been to an event they've hosted (I just started after taking a four year break from working with non-profits and also with FAST), maybe you've been to plenty, maybe you just donate and give because you believe, like I do, that what they do fills a vital need in the community, but whatever your reason, what I know for sure is that we are going to go on a journey together starting now.

One of the things that I love about blogs is that they are much more informal and personal than traditional newsletters, flyers, or informative readings. So after our events, I'm going to write about the people I meet, my experiences, and the actual event, and at the end, remind you of how you can help us continue our work. And if you need some "visual" cues along the way, I may direct you to our social media pages so you can get a better picture of what these moments and people look like.

So let's dive right in!

I don't know what you know about Rainier Beach, but I certainly didn't know a lot going in. There is a coffee place that I love (although I never remember the name) and The Kidney Center that I have been a patient of off and on during my Lupus journey, but that's it. So the Music and Walk for Change event was my first time stepping into the Rainier Beach Community Center and the community. Let me start by saying that if you haven't been there, the Community Center is lovely, and I wasn't expecting the pretty cool swim area, but I made a mental note to take my daughters there. The main courtyard was impressive, and after everything was set up, it made you feel like you were in the center of the community.

The first part of this event was the 2.5-mile walk along Rainier Beach and stopping at 5 HotSpots. Now, this wasn't just a leisurely walk; everyone was given a large yellow bag and trash grabbers to help beautify the path along the way. Right before we reached our first official stop, I noticed these community gardens built and planted right before the 4-way stop; see that woman holding the "powerful" sign? She's responsible for getting those installed. I wish I remembered her name, but I don't.



Stop One, the Light Rail. Labeled a hot spot because of the rate of violence and crime and the lack of lighting and "safety" measures in the area. One of the coolest things I learned on this walk was that there is an App called "Find It, Fix It" that allows you to report light outages, garbage, and various other things. It was easy to download and easy to figure out how to navigate. (Want to learn more about this? Reach out!).



From there, we walked to Hot Spot 2, Rose Street. Rose Street earned a spot on the list for a height of disorder, particularly around vehicles. But also gun violence, crime, drugs, and the lack of lighting quality.



Hot Spot 3 was the Lake Washington Apartments. Alongside the lighting issue, which I found was a problem throughout, there were also a lot of disturbances, noise, crime, suspicious people and vehicles, and various other things. But the Fun Fact for me here was how they had a lighted creek for the fish that traveled into Lake Washington, and I had no idea! If you ever have a chance, check it out. I didn't get to see it at night, but the markers were neat to look at, and it left me with the image of Ariel and the Prince from The Little Mermaid, rowing that boat at night with all those lights! (If you're familiar with the movie, all I could hear in the back of my mind during this imagery was Skuttle, that bird, with his awful singing voice!)



Safeway made up the 4th hot spot, and we were immediately directed to look at the various photos of those who have lost their lives to gun violence in the parking lot. I spent time looking into those faces, and honestly missed some of the other reasons that this was declared a hot spot, because I was just sad for this senseless loss of life. Funny, I drove right past this Safeway on my way to help set up this event, and I had no idea.

I learned that they worked with Safeway to add parking bumps to prevent cars from coming in, doing doughnuts, driving recklessly, and loitering. You could see the leftover marks from the tires on the pavement. Our attention was then moved to this beautiful mural next to the Safeway gas station, and I immediately made my way there. It's beautiful. It's posted on Instagram. If you want to check it out or see it in person, it's worth it. Now, I should not, that the last half of this walk, Mom's Demand Action was placed at various tents, handing out water and information. I wish I had spent more time talking with them; they're a great group of women. Check them out, as I will like their Facebook page.



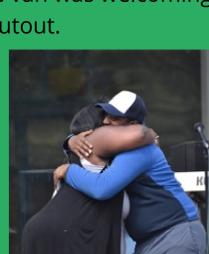
The fifth and final hot spot was the beginning and end of the walk, the community center. And as we walked through the excited people waiting to welcome us back, I couldn't help but think that this walk was well put together, and for someone like me who had never been anywhere in Rainier Beach, I was struck both by the need for the community, but also the beauty. At one point, we were walking along, and a kid was standing on the edge of a lawn mower with his dad pushing; they were waving and saying hi and looked just happy, and just as we rounded the corner, there was an immense amount of trash in a place inhabited by the homeless. I had a very "this is why we do this" feeling. There were numerous times when people honked at those who were picking up trash or took the time to yell out a "thank you," which just emphasized the need this community has, the hard work of these organizations, and the gratitude of the community they're working in and for.

The event's music portion started with speakers, lyricists, and poems. Moms who lost their children to gun violence, begging a community to do better, teens were expressing their talents and hopes for a communities future, artists showing off musical talents while challenging ideals, all while kids were getting their faces painted, people were walking around with bags filled with resource information, and everyone enjoying the food and company.



And even though they were the silent partner of the event, in almost every picture I took from the stage, the Seattle Cancer Care Alliance van could be seen on the scene to offer mammograms to women over 40. I had a moment before the events started to go inside and meet the women running the show; they were so welcoming, open, and happy. I am two years away from having to get one, but I know that it can cause a lot of stress for some or be scary if it's the first time or even the 10th, but the van was welcoming, and you felt like it was a personal experience. I want to make sure I send them a shoutout.

My conclusion? So much is being done to work with the community and businesses to create a better and safer community. Driving into the community center, you aren't aware of all the hard work. So learning about the corner greeters and the Find It, Fix It app, or the fact that the Kidney Center I've gone to was a part of the beautification effort, was eye-opening.



Want to learn more about the efforts of the people who helped make this event a success? Head over to our website and contact us now! Want to share a personal experience? Send a message via Facebook (Fast - Fathers and sons together) or a direct message on Instagram. Want to see some of these spots and people I talked about? Go over to Instagram (@fastfathersandsonstogether) to take the walk with me. Or just give us a follow, it matters. Exposure makes a huge difference in the community we want to serve. So even though it only takes a few seconds to look us up and hit the "like/follow" button, what you're doing is huge for us. Seriously, go do it.

Make sure you stay up to date on all the great events that are coming up, you can find them under the events tab on our website. And if you can, donate or volunteer your time. All of this is done by the generosity of other people, the more you do, the more we are capable of.

So I want to close our very first blog together with the poem that Lincoln Wilmore, a 17-year old Rainier Beach resident and community activist (check out his clothing line WeAreAmazing365) and wrote, during the Walk for Change event.

WHY WE WALK FOR CHANGE

By Lincoln Wilmore

WHO ARE WE?

We are the most

diverse community in Washington State.

We represent many different races and ethnicities.

We are brilliant and resilient.

We are Rainier Beach.

WHY DO WE WALK

We walk for those who have sat in a parking lot, enjoying a sunny day.

We walk for those at the park wanting to play.

We walk for those sitting at a bus stop, just trying to get home.

We walk for the homeless and the hungry.

We walk for those families who have been affected by gun violence. Directly or indirectly.

For the unsolved cases of youth violence

black on black violence

gang violence

domestic violence

And unfortunately, so much more

WE WALK FOR THOSE WITH

Mental health issues

Depression,

Lack of belonging,

and for those that hide their frown with a smile.

We walk for public safety:

for our mothers and daughters

fathers, and sons,

and our elders.

We walk in hope.

Hope for a safer community,

a beautiful community,

a community that is not filled...

with crime, trash,

or hidden by dark city lights

WHY DO WE DEMAND CHANGE?

Because our lives matter.

Our relationships matter.

Our families matter.

Our community matters.

Just as our beautiful lakefront beaches,

beautiful mountain views, tall trees,

we deserve positive change and the opportunities to blossom

despite the thorns thrown our way.

WE WALK BECAUSE

WE ARE AMAZING 365 days a year ...24/7!

Rainier Beach is a beautiful, safe place for youth and families,

and this is why **WE WALK FOR CHANGE!**

