

KPR Case Study

National
Foster Care
Month

Change a
Lifetime

Background

National Foster Care Month (NFCM) is held annually each May to raise public awareness about the need for more people to make a difference in the lives of the 518,000 children and youth living in foster care in the U.S. A partnership of 14 national child welfare organizations and advocates led by Casey Family Programs, launched National Foster Care Month and the "Change a Lifetime" campaign to educate individuals and communities and stimulate their involvement in the hundreds of ways they can help meet the needs of those living in foster care.

Since its origination in 1988, National Foster Care Month has received limited media coverage. This began to change somewhat in the last few years, but there was still ample room for improvement. Recently, KPR was asked to partner with True Insight Marketing (the consulting firm responsible for managing and executing the marketing and communications campaign for National Foster Care Month), to capture and significantly increase broad national media attention.

The mission was to heighten public awareness about National Foster Care Month 2006 as an awareness-raising platform for issues affecting children and youth in foster care and their families. In the past, press coverage had generally been limited to regional outlets. KPR was asked to drastically change this approach and secure prominent national media attention. The campaign's goal was to increase overall press coverage by 10%.

Challenges and Opportunity

Just about every major cause in America today, whether it be AIDS prevention, eliminating cancer, eradicating poverty and so on, now has a day, a week or a month designated to calling attention to the cause and motivating people to take action. The overwhelming majority of these campaigns are of course, most worthy of attention, but each finds itself competing for finite media coverage. National Foster Care Month also had its own unique set of challenges that threatened to severely limit press coverage.

First, we needed to work within the confines of an extremely limited budget (\$40,000). Second, we were presented with a roster of second-tier "celebrities," who, while motivated (most were one-time foster kids), were not exactly household names- Victoria



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Rowell, a soap opera actress, and Keith Bullock, a football player, just to name two. Third, another difficulty was the complexity of coordinating message points among the 14 members of the partnership.

Our greatest challenge, and undoubtedly the trickiest to overcome, was the fact that the press could not interview foster kids, because they were underage and considered wards of the state. We were permitted to share their stories, in many cases anonymously, but were not permitted to have them interviewed or photographed by any member of the press. It was under these limitations and constraints that KPR was able to design a program that would cut through the clutter of the literally hundreds of cause-related messages that were sent to the media each day.

Strategy and Tactics

After first consulting key members of the media who cover foster care and parenting issues, we reached the crucial strategic decision that most of the press was simply not inclined to link foster care coverage directly to the fact that May was National Foster Care Month. Many reporters indicated that the monthly time frame was just not that important to their readership, but that they would be very interested in working with us beyond that parameter to generate stories about foster care.

So we embarked on a very deliberate strategic approach to generate media attention even though the press was less inclined to assign importance to the issue of foster care within the context of a "designated month." Instead, we would focus the bulk of our media outreach on five storylines we developed that outlined the most prominent issues associated with foster care today. In addition, we worked to time our outreach well enough in advance to allow subsequent coverage to hit just before, during and shortly after the month of May. Armed with this critical assumption, we soon found that the media was extremely receptive to our outreach and messaging and were willing to seriously consider a pitch from NFCM.

We were also able to overcome our inability to have an underage foster child speak to reporters by developing a rapid response team of foster care alumni who were now 18 and older and able to speak to the media about their foster care experiences given short notice. We also conducted extensive research into their back stories that we could pitch along the lines of our campaign-driving storylines.

Results

The media relations campaign was a huge success, wildly exceeding all expectations. The effort generated 173.8 million print impressions and 59.8 million broadcast impressions for a total of 233.6 million impressions. This represented a 118% increase compared to the results of the previous year, well exceeding the initial 10% increase goal.

Among the highlights of the media campaign was an appearance on Dr. Phil, which aired a compelling and provocative show that featured Elaine Newkirk, an extraordinary foster parent who not only was able to receive the recognition she long deserved, but also received more than \$50,000 in goods and services from Dr. Phil's foundation to aid her cause.

story and to maximize the coverage. Yet most importantly, what made this effort so enormously successful from a strategic viewpoint were the business results it subsequently achieved for our client.

As a direct result of our efforts and the powerful press coverage Trufresh received, the company signed several multi-million dollar deals with seafood producers in a number of its product lines. Trufresh executives also tell us that its revenues have since skyrocketed to record heights. Not a bad return on investment for bringing lobsters back from the dead and about \$10,000 worth of agency activity.