

### *ChildFund Sustained Media Relations*

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**NEED/OPPORTUNITY** / ChildFund is a smaller player in the New Zealand development aid sector. This area of the local charity market is dominated by large, internationally recognised brands such as World Vision and Oxfam, who have far higher advertising and overall marketing budgets. Development aid agencies in general battle both “donor fatigue” and credibility issues about whether sponsorship money really “gets there.”

ChildFund’s limited public awareness was compounded by a recent re-branding (from Christian Children’s Fund). Although ChildFund is a nonreligious charity, the old name hindered the recognition of this point. ChildFund needed to take a fresh, new approach in order to achieve cut-through. With a limited marketing budget that prevented ChildFund New Zealand from matching the level of above-the-line marketing activity of similar charities, the charity believed that an effective PR campaign would assist in differentiating its organisation from others and increasing its visibility.

ChildFund’s success in raising its profile—and therefore income—would have a very real impact on its ability to deliver hope and opportunity to children in need and their families. ChildFund had no internal PR resource so Network PR was engaged to develop and implement the first media relations programme ChildFund New Zealand had ever embarked on.

#### **INTENDED AUDIENCE(S) / PRIMARY AUDIENCES**

- ▶ Potential new ChildFund sponsors: those who may be willing to commit on an ongoing basis
- ▶ Potential one-off contributors: those not interested in the child sponsorship commitment but who could be motivated to make a one-off donation (nontraditional audiences)

#### **OTHER AUDIENCES**

- ▶ Media
- ▶ Current ChildFund child sponsors
- ▶ Key opinion leaders

**GOALS AND OBJECTIVES / Goal:** Establish ChildFund as the charity of choice for those who want to help children in need overseas

**Objectives:**

1. Increase awareness of ChildFund as a nonreligious development aid agency that really does make a difference in the lives of children in need.
2. Increase ChildFund's total annual donor income.
3. Increase the number of ChildFund children sponsored by New Zealanders.
4. Develop innovative ways to connect with nontraditional audiences.

**SOLUTION OVERVIEW /** Network PR developed a sustained, strategic media relations programme for ChildFund based on the positioning of "Real Kiwis making a real difference." This positioning was deliberately chosen in order to underline the effectiveness of ChildFund's work (i.e., demonstrate that the average Kiwi can effect change in the developing world) and as a foil to the use of high-profile celebrities by ChildFund's key competitors.

Aware of "donor fatigue," solutions were designed to emphasise the positive, focusing on the outcomes achieved as result of support from New Zealanders and delivering a clear picture of what individual contributions actually achieved; thus avoiding the guilt or pity approach often used by others. There was an emphasis on personal connections established between Kiwi sponsors and their sponsored child/family. The team leveraged the personal testimonies of real sponsors who had taken the initiative to visit their sponsored child/family and could give a first-hand account of the difference their personal contribution has made not just for a child, but for a whole community.

In addition to the more traditional approach, at times the team sought to be different by using humour and quirky offerings to engage with audiences that might never have considered supporting a development aid charity before.

**TACTICS**

- ▶ The team maintained a programme of identifying "running" news stories where ChildFund experts could be offered as credible and knowledgeable interviewees. This was particularly successful with Kiwi aid worker Maureen Duffy, who was working on the ground for ChildFund in Chad, responding to the refugee crisis caused by conflict in neighbouring Sudan. Maureen appeared in newspaper and broadcast interviews, and continues to be consulted by New Zealand media since returning home.
- ▶ An ongoing "Sponsor Story" programme was established where Network PR reviewed the details of all sponsors proposing to visit their sponsored child, identifying potential media angles, liaising with the sponsor, and pitching each story to appropriate media outlets including daily and com-

munity newspapers. These sponsor stories are invaluable in demonstrating the benefits of ChildFund child sponsorship and were not previously being leveraged.

- ▶ When highly-rated U.S. television drama ER screened a “special” highlighting the conflict and humanitarian issues in Sudan/Darfur, the team negotiated with the television network to have ChildFund’s 800 donation line and web site details appear as a standalone graphic at the end of the show.
- ▶ When ChildFund launched a gift catalogue, “Gifts That Grow,” as a gift-giving alternative for Christmas 2006, the team developed innovative media kits consisting of a hand decorated paper bag with straw in the bottom and several plastic farm animals. The twist came six months later when they repeated the exercise with the same media database—except this time the bag was empty—demonstrating that the Christmas gifts purchased by New Zealanders had reached the intended recipients.
- ▶ For the updated Christmas 2007 “Gifts That Grow” catalogue, the team deliberately targeted non-traditional media outlets with very tailored gift selections in order to achieve coverage. As a result, top-end culinary magazine *Cuisine* encouraged readers to buy a family lambs, chickens or turkeys; the *New Zealand Plumbers’ Journal* encouraged members to fund much needed latrines; and rural media, such as *NZ Dairying Today*, encouraged farmers to buy a valuable milking cow for a third-world family. Through careful media targeting, the team reached niche audiences with messages that resonated with their readers, exposed them to ChildFund’s work and encouraged them to consider this style of philanthropy.
- ▶ Throughout the year, the team continued to leverage “Gifts That Grow” for other festive occasions, with a cheeky and irreverent approach that appealed to media. For instance, the media release in the lead-up to Father’s Day encouraged people to “Get Dad a hoe for Father’s Day” (actual gardening equipment for a farmer in a developing country), and the response to ChildFund’s call centre was immediate as the orders rolled in. Other holiday events targeted with the “Gifts That Grow” message included Valentine’s Day, Mother’s Day and Halloween.
- ▶ As part of a new media engagement programme, ChildFund hosted a morning tea at the offices of one of New Zealand’s leading magazine houses, which publishes a range of leading titles. Several months later, this networking resulted in a valuable feature story in the young woman’s magazine *Cleo*, featuring a ChildFund sponsor who had traveled to Africa to meet her sponsored child.

#### COMMUNICATION VEHICLES

- ▶ **Trade media:** These types of publication are not the usual focus for charity appeals but were very receptive to well targeted media pitching that was relevant to their audiences (e.g., *Cuisine*—turkeys; *NZ Plumber’s Journal*—latrines; agricultural media—cattle, goats and chickens).
- ▶ **Media kit:** In promoting the inaugural “Gifts that Grow” catalogue, the team created a media kit with a deliberately homemade feel, in line with ChildFund’s nonprofit status. The kit was also eye-

catching and effectively delivered the message—particularly with the follow-up “empty bag” media kit.

- ▶ **Media releases:** The team emphasised the key ChildFund messages with concise media releases that often employed humour and/or a quirky approach. These releases would be tailored for specific audiences and distributed to appropriate media, influencers and outlets.
- ▶ **One-to-one meetings:** A media engagement programme saw key ChildFund staff engage with important media. These meetings have yielded positive media opportunities. For example, a meeting with a feature reporter from the *Dominion Post* (a major daily paper) has resulted in ChildFund opinion/editorials being published; a meeting with the editor of the *Education Gazette* has resulted in important support in the *Education Weekly* for a ChildFund Zambian teacher exchange programme rolling out in 2008.

#### IMPLEMENTATION AND CHALLENGES / IMPLEMENTATION

ChildFund’s annual budget was NZ\$25,000, and Network PR effectively doubled that by offering a dollar-for-dollar contribution of time on a pro bono basis.

The whole agency was actively on board to support ChildFund, with consultants engaging in the programmes, volunteering their breaks/lunch hours for brainstorming and promoting the charity’s cause in their own non-work time. Across the consultancy, staff would formulate ideas or see opportunities that ChildFund could utilise, and in this sense it was very much a team effort from Network PR.

#### CHALLENGES

Network PR faced a number of challenges in developing and implementing a comprehensive media relations programme for ChildFund.

- ▶ Initially some media questioned why ChildFund was employing a top-of-the-line PR firm. This was managed by pointing out that a pro bono rate had been negotiated. This has led to an ongoing requirement that the organization’s PR services remain “behind the scenes”—a challenge the team accepted and managed willingly. Where possible and appropriate, the team helps ChildFund staff to engage directly with media and ensure that Network PR remains in the background. The team also ensures that media materials are seen to be appropriately economical for a nonprofit (i.e., hand drawn images on the paper bag media kits for “Gifts That Grow”).
- ▶ As with any charity, budget restrictions were an issue, and some great ideas/opportunities could not be executed due to lack of funds.
- ▶ The very tailored media pitching that proved so successful was also very time consuming and therefore expensive. As ChildFund’s own staff have upskilled in this area, some of this work can now be handed over.

- ▶ During crisis appeals, communicating with ChildFund's representatives in the field was challenging and meant the team couldn't always get the information and images they would have liked.
- ▶ ChildFund's comparatively recent re-branding meant there continued to be confusion about the brand name. The solution was patience and persistence. At times media had to be politely reminded of the organisation's correct name.
- ▶ Misconceptions about overseas aid agencies are cited as a significant barrier to many potential donors. How much money actually gets through? Surely there is an equal and more pressing need for aid at home? Does the child or the issue really exist? These are all frequently asked questions. The strategic approach was to show real people helping other real people and consistently focusing on positive outcomes and providing a real sense of empowerment to potential sponsors. Alongside this, ChildFund New Zealand seeks to position itself as a down-to-earth, efficient but humble organisation that enables the sponsors' money to make a real difference.
- ▶ In New Zealand's small market (population: 4.1 million, three free-to-air TV stations, five major daily newspapers), there is the constant challenge of getting to the public first with a particular issue when the landscape is dominated by bigger charities like World Vision, Oxfam and Save the Children. For instance, ChildFund's 800 number (free call number) would invariably be left off lists of relief/aid organisations, as media outlets more readily recalled and identified larger organisations.

#### **MEASUREMENT/EVALUATION /**

- ▶ The total number of child sponsors at the end of 2007 was 24,000, compared with 23,138 at the end of 2006.
- ▶ The "Gifts That Grow" catalogue enjoyed significant success around certain key events, such as Father's Day (NZ\$4,440 in sales), Valentines Day (NZ\$17,500) and Christmas (NZ\$275,000 in sales).
- ▶ The Christmas 2007 figure, when compared to the amount reached in 2006 (NZ\$185,000), showed a marked 60 percent increase thanks to Network PR's specific campaign.
- ▶ The 2007 catalogue generated 2,307 individual contributors, compared to the previous year's 1,210 contributors, a 91 percent increase.
- ▶ Positive ongoing relationships have been developed with several media outlets, resulting in positive support in articles and a willingness to consult ChildFund experts on certain issues (i.e., conflicts in Africa and Asia).
- ▶ Engaging with certain media (i.e., trade publications) that were not previously used for charity appeals, and gaining strong support from them for specific programmes and ChildFund's messages.

