SUBMITTED BY: Lisa Desatnik PROJECT: Collecting for Kids Campaign
Division: B Category: Community Relations CAMPAIGN

BACKGROUND: ACT is a welfare diversion agency. It works with Hamilton County families in financial crisis and helps them to make positive life changes, that will ultimately keep them from needing public assistance. When I began working with ACT in 12/04, the social service agency had a low profile. There was a need to raise awareness and increase its partnership base because the agency depends on private support to fund its programs. To do this while furthering its mission, I wanted to develop a campaign that would generate broad public support.

RESEARCH: At the most preliminary level, research involved investigating what that campaign would be. Purchasing school supplies was definitely one of the financial hurdles ACT participants faced on their journey toward self-sufficiency. ACT was already asking for donations on a very small scale, so I wanted to explore this. I looked into what other competition was out there. Other agencies and schools were also holding supply drives; however, the biggest campaign was for an organization that collects supplies for teachers. I felt that our message was different enough to make this a very doable idea for a campaign; however, positioning was going to be key. We had previously done some attitudinal research. ACT brought together a group of business/community leaders and asked what about ACT's mission/purpose was most compelling. I also conducted informal interviews with community members and media about their opinion on people who receive welfare, on what ACT strives to accomplish, and on their general awareness of ACT. It wasn't surprising – most people I talked to held the view that people who were on public assistance should be accountable. Few people had heard of ACT, but when told what ACT does, were very much in favor of supporting an organization that diverts families from welfare, holds them accountable and helps them to be successful. Additionally, I thought about other collection drives – such as for food – and what made them successful.

PLANNING: There was (is) definitely a need for the campaign. ACT serves nearly 1300 families each year – all of whom are at 150% of poverty or below. However, in creating a community-wide campaign, there were several obstacles. One being that the agency was relatively unknown and we were going to be competing against a very established campaign plus other established and more visible organizations for exposure and donations. The other big obstacle was budget. As a non-profit, there was a very limited budget for this. Target audiences were: the general public, businesses in Greater Cincinnati, and the local media. The goals/objectives for the campaign were: **1.** Increase awareness about ACT and why ACT is important **2.** Increase the number of individual and organization supporters of ACT and strengthen support from existing donors (exceeding 10 organizations was the first year's goals, expanding those partnerships and adding 5 more plus additional individual support was the second year's) **3.** Collect school supplies for as many ACT participating families as possible.

Positioning was key. Firstly by naming it 'Collecting for Kids' we were clearly distinguishing it from the campaign for teachers. From the attitudinal research I knew it was important to use the Campaign as a vehicle to get the message across that ACT was an organization that isn't about hand-outs, but rather about helping families in financial crisis to make positive life changes and diverting them from public assistance. What distinguished this Campaign from other school supply campaigns was that this one wasn't just about helping needy families but families in need who are working hard to be successful with the help of ACT. I made sure that message came through in everything we did to promote the drive.

To create this campaign with as little out-of-pocket expenses as possible, I looked for ways we could get the most exposure for the least amount of cost. I also tried to get much of our needs met through donations. Among the elements I incorporated into my planning were: holding the kick-off in a public venue; finding ways to involve the media; targeting companies who would be willing to hold internal collections; finding a business with a natural tie-in to have displays and serve as convenient drop off

locations; designing materials in high and low resolutions for printing and email purposes; distributing mass emails. Expenses for the Campaign ended up totaling approximately $2000.

Another component was making sure that everyone who donated felt appreciated and felt a connection with the agency. This would help to ensure their future commitment to the organization.

EXECUTION: This was very much an organized grass roots effort that involved a number of low cost strategies and tactics. For the first year, the Campaign kick-off was held on Cincinnati's busy Fountain Square. Due to construction, the 2006 Campaign kick-off was held in a parking lot adjoining to ACT and on a busy downtown street. In keeping with highlighting the abilities of young people, both featured youth performances. The Cincinnati Herald was secured as a media partner during the first year, and this year I was able to secure three additional major media partners. Collectively, the media partners donated more than $175,00 worth of commercial exposure to ACT and the Campaign. The majority of that included the key message of what ACT does and how it helps families. Other key elements included securing Office Depot as a partner to serve as convenient drop off sites, and also as vehicles for displaying information about the Campaign and ACT to area business professionals; and encouraging businesses and organizations to hold their own collections. Each partner was given materials to share with their internal audience (or employees) about the Campaign, which also incorporated key messages about ACT. The Cincinnati Zoo offered every donor a coupon for buy one, get one free admission. Also, to save costs, all materials except the large poster were printed internally on ACT's color laser printer and folded by staff. To show appreciation to donors and build on the relationship, they were recognized in an ad in the Cincinnati Herald, thanked and placed on the ACT newsletter mailing list. The first year, organizations were recognized at an awards luncheon. The second year, I included a thank you from the students who benefited in my notes to donors.

RESULTS: The Campaign has been unbelievably success beyond any expectations. In its first year, we surpassed the number of organizational partners, gained more support from established supporters, and had a lot of exposure. Most of the organizations who got involved felt so good about their involvement, they increased it the second year. Examples include – The Precinct, a sister restaurant of Jeff Ruby's Steakhouse, also gave donations; Office Depot expanded the number of stores having displays to the entire Greater Cincinnati area; Federated Department Stores stepped up their internal campaign, generating more donations and having employees who wanted to volunteer; and FOX19 expanded their role to being a major media sponsor – working with me in producing the PSA, making the initial contact with Q102 for me and eventually partnering with Q102 and Drees Homes in developing a spin off school supply collection to benefit ACT (and a Northern Kentucky non-profit). Other organizations came on board this year because they were impressed with last year's Campaign and information I gave them about the agency. Some examples of that are Time Warner Cable and the Cincinnati Zoo. Media exposure alone to ACT as a result of the Campaign is estimated to be valued at more than $175,000. And, many of those exposures had mention of the key positioning statement – that ACT helps people to be successful and accountable. In its second year, the Campaign collected enough to help more than 700 children with an estimated $35,000 in monetary and product donations. Also, the Cincinnati Zoo gave 500 tickets to ACT for participating families and the Cincinnati Reds gave 1000 tickets to a home game. The Campaign also generated phone calls from people in the community who wanted to volunteer. I heard over and over from acquaintances and colleagues that they had never heard of ACT until the school supply campaign.