

Child Protection Charity Communication Proposal

CONTEXT

Child protection is a very sensitive issue in Romania. While we can't deny that very important improvements have been made in the last 15 years, there is still a lot of work to be done. Some of the most notable progresses include: the decrease in number of the institutionalized children (from 100,000 children living in child care institutions during the mid nineties, to 32,000 in 2004); the development of alternative solutions to child care homes, such as the efforts to place the children with relatives, maternal assistants, the building of social apartment, etc; the introduction of Law 272 on the Protection and Promotion of Child Rights. All these changes were possible due to the combined effort of the Romanian state, EU and the civil society.

Despite all this progress Romania is still facing tremendous challenges: prevention of abandonment, finding viable solutions for children living in the streets, providing a future for older children or children with special needs living in child care homes, roma children, as well as the whole issue of trafficking and child labor, and the corruption in the allocation of contracts at the local level. It is very important that civil society is decisively involved in finding an answer to these problems.

ANALYSIS AND TARGET AUDIENCE

THE CHILD PROTECTION CHARITY seeks to give practical answers to poverty and to provide a family for those without. In order to achieve these goals, THE CHILD PROTECTION CHARITY speaks to several target audience: families in risk of abandoning their children, public institutions, donors, and the general public. Each of these groups has to play its part in helping THE CHILD PROTECTION CHARITY achieve its mission, and each of these groups shares different characteristics, that need to be taken into consideration when approaching them with any kind of message.

Public institutions and donors

In 2005, the National Authority for the Protection of Child Rights (NAPCR) was set up. NAPCR is responsible for continuing the development of the child protection policies (developing alternatives to child care homes, informing the general audience about child rights, training and monitoring professionals in the child care system). NAPCR also advises the 42 County Directorates for Social Assistance and Child Protection, which come under the administrative and financial control of the county councils. Other relevant institutions are the Romanian Adoption Office and the High Level Group for Romania Children (The Prime Minister's Office).

Donors include the European Commission through its Phare funds, the British Embassy, as well as other embassies, Worldbank, USAID, and numerous private funds.

These organizations need to form partnerships with civil society representatives, and they need to be informed about trustworthy partners. Helping children is a very complex endeavor and trying to take it on by yourself, can prove very difficult. That is why forming partnerships can be an effective way to overcome obstacles.

Families in risk of abandoning their children

The main reasons a mother abandons a baby are poverty, stigma and lack of knowledge about the welfare benefits available. Therefore we need to find a way to let mothers know that there are alternatives to child abandonment, there are people who can support them and help them keep their baby.

We think that the cases where a mother feels no connection with her child and abandons it without remorse are very few. That is why convincing mothers not to abandon their child is a question of information and persuasion. So, it is important to identify a way to “talk” to these women.

General audience

The Romanian public has a rather negative picture of the child protection system in Romania. People still remember the documentaries about child homes under the Communist regime, they read negative articles in the Romanian press, and they hear about the negative articles that appear in the foreign press. Child protection is still a story that has a hint of scandal, with “favorite” subjects like children living in the streets, abuse, trafficking, child labor, HIV/AIDS.

We might therefore be facing some reluctance from the general audience to open up to the subject. People tend to block out disturbing images and stories and I myself heard many times various people saying things like why people don't talk about the talented children of this country, why people don't invest in these children. We have to be very careful about how we present our story. We need find a message that shows that we acknowledge that progress is happening and our purposes is to make this progress happen faster.

OBJECTIVES

Based on the above analysis, we propose the following objectives:

1. Form partnerships with public institutions and donors.
2. Inform families at risk of abandoning their children about THE CHILD PROTECTION CHARITY's alternatives.
3. Create awareness about THE CHILD PROTECTION CHARITY among the general audience (especially women).
4. Set up THE CHILD PROTECTION CHARITY membership scheme

ACTIVITIES

For each of the four proposed objectives, we have identified the following activities, described below in a chronological order.

1. Form partnerships with public institutions and donors

An informative folder could be an effective tool to reach these groups. The folder will contain general information about THE CHILD PROTECTION CHARITY and its activities. The folder should be used as handouts in meetings as well as sending it by mail with a personalized letter. All folders should contain a "letter of intent", with content personalized to each organization, so that they have a clear understanding of the type of collaboration you are looking for. You would need a volunteer to regularly follow things up, because maintaining partnerships requires a lot of time.

2. Inform families at risk of abandoning their children about THE CHILD PROTECTION CHARITY's alternatives

We propose to design and produce an informative leaflet that could be distributed in maternities and city/village health points ("dispensar"). The leaflet should be written in a simple and clear way, and printed cheaply, and it would be advisable to make reference to a toll free number (paid for by THE CHILD PROTECTION CHARITY), so that mothers can get in touch with THE CHILD PROTECTION CHARITY free of charge.

We could send bulk packages of 200 leaflets throughout the country, with the normal post, in order to save mailing costs. The leaflets should be accompanied by an official letter from a government organization, stating its support for the program. Such a letter should be directed to the maternity lead doctor, who is a key person in the success of this informative campaign. We want to avoid a situation where the maternity receives this package and forgets about it in some corner of the hospital. The leaflets should come with "instructions", letting doctors know that this is an official program, and they have to make sure the leaflets get to the mothers.

The packaging and the posting could be handled by a volunteer, who could also be responsible for getting the mailing addresses and building the database. In order to make the best use of THE CHILD PROTECTION CHARITY's money, we suggest we start with a pilot distribution in Bucharest and Suceava. If people take an interest in THE CHILD PROTECTION CHARITY's material, then we can invest in producing a bigger quantity of leaflets and plan a countrywide distribution.

3. Create awareness about THE CHILD PROTECTION CHARITY among the general audience.

This is probably the most complicated task, because it usually requires a lot of resources in order to get yourself known to a broader audience. The media is the intermediary through which to get to the general audience and there are several ways of getting media coverage with little money.

One suggestion is to form a partnership with a media group that owns women and mother/baby magazines, such as Sanoma Hearst (Cosmopolitan and Mami) or Academia Catavencu (Tabu, Superbebe). We could ask them to print a one page article + photo, and maybe also donate a very small amount of money for each sold magazine. This way, all the women who buy the magazine, also pay a donation to THE CHILD PROTECTION CHARITY. This partnership will be beneficial for both parties: the magazines get to show their readers that they are interested in more than just selling a copy, and THE CHILD PROTECTION CHARITY would get the exposure it needs. This activity requires a dedicated person, someone who works for THE CHILD PROTECTION CHARITY, to contact the magazine and convince them to get involved.

Another activity that could be developed after this type of media partnership has a history is a fundraising event with sponsors to pay for the logistics (that could be

turned into a yearly thing). The advantage of organizing this type of event with a strong women's magazine is that it will attract celebrities, which usually creates media buzz.

4. Set up a THE CHILD PROTECTION CHARITY membership scheme

In time, this media partnership could be built up by introducing in each copy of the magazine a printed donation insert that women who buy the magazines can use to donate whatever sum they choose and thus, we can start to build Romanian membership for THE CHILD PROTECTION CHARITY.

Another way of attracting new members is to have an online newsletter, in the form of a simple email (no creative or production costs), that can be sent out every three months to announce the latest CHILD PROTECTION CHARITY news. This online newsletter should contain a reference to the website membership form. In order to ensure the success of the newsletter, it is important that we start with a well built database, where we introduce all the people that THE CHILD PROTECTION CHARITY comes in contact in. This database should be updated every month. The only resource that this activity does require is a person to keep the data base going, write the articles and email the newsletter every three month. Again you could use a volunteer, for example a PR student, who is eager to have some experience in communications.

To conclude, our aim was to find cost effective activities that would have good results. Once people start to know who THE CHILD PROTECTION CHARITY is, there should also be more money from donations and membership fees, which could allow us to develop more complex activities.

COMPANY CREDENTIALS

Productive International Romania helps organizations communicate better. We are experienced in helping public institutions in Romania, as well as small companies, develop communications strategies and then promote themselves in the most cost-effective way.

We specialize in creating communication strategies for public sector and small private organizations, especially those which do not have a communications strategy already. With our mix of NGO, media and public sector experience we are able to offer a communication service to public sector bodies that have been ineffective communicators to date. We also prefer the "low cost/high impact" approach as described above, and are good at getting the most out of limited resources.

Clients include Mercury Promotions, a leading Romanian advertising agency, for whom we set up a EU Projects Department which went on to win almost 4,000,000 Euro worth of awareness raising projects for various government ministries (including the promotion of SAPARD).

Other clients have included the British Embassy, for whom we produced an award winning documentary film on a Roma family, and the British Government's Department for International Development (DFID) with whom we published a book (www.partnersforeurope.ro) and provided communications strategies and support to two of Romania's 8 regional development agencies.

Annex 1 – Estimated budget

The budget contains estimative costs for the described activities. While the design and print are budgeted, we decided not to charge for our consultancy time, which is our “donation” to THE CHILD PROTECTION CHARITY.