

# A Great Idea

Strategies that work from the members of the National Association of Child Advocates



February 2003

## Communications

### *Virginia Child Advocates Improve Their Political Fortunes By Serving Up Some Chinese Carryout*

#### *Summary*

Voices for Virginia's Children hand delivered to key state legislators Chinese carryout boxes containing highlighters, coasters and bookmarks. All of the material was affixed with the organization's logo. The carryout box was accompanied by the organization's business card and a letter thanking policymakers for their hard work on behalf of children. Because the material all had the organization's contact information, policymakers would be able to easily reach the organization with questions. As an added benefit, the material informed policymakers of Voices recent name change from The Action Alliance for Virginia's Children and Youth.

#### *Background*

Voices for Virginia's Children had worked closely with 75 key legislators to preserve funding during the 2002-2003 legislative session. Times in Virginia, like in other parts of the country, were tough financially, indicating potential cuts to much needed programs. But Voices for Virginia's Children was able to work closely with many state legislators and other advocates to secure substantive gains in the children's health insurance program, including adding mental health benefits. Moreover, many of these legislators, serving on key committees, had proven themselves open

to new legislation that would positively impact children. Voices knew that, like anyone, these legislators needed to feel appreciated. And Voices needed to let the legislators know that even though the organization was operating under a new name, it was still available to policymakers. So, staff members at Voices decided the cheapest way to achieve all of this was to package some simple supplies, with its new logo, and deliver them to legislators in a cleverly-designed container: the Chinese carryout box.

#### *Key Elements*

- ◆ A Voices staff member went to a local craft store that sold Chinese carryout containers. The staff member purchased 75 containers at \$.60 each. The containers came in different colors, but Voices decided on yellow since that is the organization's color.
- ◆ Voices then visited a web site to purchase the highlighters at \$.23 each and the coasters at \$.70 each.
- ◆ The policy director at Voices wrote a note that was printed in-house on note cards for each Legislator. The note read: "Thank you for your hard work this session on issues affecting the children and families of Virginia! Please continue to contact us as a resource. Our name has changed,

*Continued on reverse side*

*but our mission is still the same: To build a powerful voice for children and to inspire the people of Virginia to act on their behalf*

- ◆ Once the material arrived, an intern spent three hours placing the items and note in the Chinese carryout packages.
- ◆ The intern then hand delivered the material to each legislator at the state capitol.

### Things To Think About

- ◆ Mailing the Chinese carryout packet would be costly and hard to mail because of the dimensions. The best approach is to hand deliver them to legislators, which also gives it that added personal touch.
- ◆ It is most cost effective to be selective in who receives the material. Think about delivering it to your legislature's leadership, policymakers on key committees and those who have gone to great lengths to improve conditions for children.
- ◆ Because many of the materials were already ordered to publicize the name change, it was helpful and cost effective for Voices to prepare the boxes. Consider taking resources you have from other projects and using them for a project similar to this one.

### Staff Time

- ◆ The Vice President and Director of Strategic Communications at Voices spent an hour selecting supplies and ordering the material.
- ◆ The Policy Director spent 20 minutes drafting one note to legislators that would be copied onto note cards.
- ◆ One intern spent 4 hours putting the packets together and delivering them.

### Costs

- ◆ The boxes and material costs about \$1.50 each. Because staff time was minimal it was not factored into the costs. Had the material been mailed, the expense would have been much greater.

### Outcomes

- ◆ The legislators, who received the box of materials, expressed their appreciation by calling, e-mailing and sending letters to Voices. They all let the organization know that they enjoyed receiving the highlighters and coasters because they are useful. They also appreciated the note of gratitude.
- ◆ Voices successfully informed key legislators about the organization's name change and got its contact information on the desks of legislators.

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