

## A Book-Smart Approach: Kansas Action for Children's *Helping Hands*

Kansas Action for Children

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*Issuing an annual report card is a time-tested way to bring attention to the staggering statistics often associated with the condition of children in a given state. Kansas Action for Children (KAC) was able to squeeze its project budget to also produce a hardcover book that concretely raises visibility among child-friendly professionals and gives the media a hook to explore.*

### Background:

KAC regularly works with an independent marketing consultant to design and promote its annual *Kansas Children's Report Card*. The consultant had once suggested publishing a book in concert with the report, and KAC was able to carry the idea forward after identifying surplus funds in its 2003 project budget. The hope was to link KAC to a new audience of potential child advocates, using *Helping Hands* as a timeless example of how everyone has something to contribute.

### Key Elements

**Determining scope** – KAC envisioned a book that brought together Kansas children's short essays and poems with customized art created by Kansas adults. It was to be widely shared with professionals working on the front lines with children, with a secondary goal of reaching the parents with whom they work.

**Staffing** – KAC staff (3 people, off and on) and the consultant worked on the project, which spanned the better part of a year. KAC's overall workload was three times that of the normal report card process due to the preparation of a supplemental briefing book and calendar.

**Finding participants** – Posters seeking submissions, developed by KAC's consultant, were placed in Kansas schools in late spring. The twelve artists chosen donated their services and were listed with brief biographies in the closing credits.

**Distribution** – In addition to a press conference to announce KAC's updated report card, KAC sent a copy of *Helping Hands* to every pediatrician, general practitioner, and dentist in the state. Copies went to every public library, school district, and child care center, as well as to many of KAC's local nonprofit partners, with a total of 7,000 books eventually being placed around the state. In most cases, KAC had not previously had any type of relationship with the recipients.

**Promotion** – KAC planned two book signings in the state's two largest cities – one at a bookstore and one at a library – bringing in artists and young authors to highlight their collaboration and affording KAC board



members an opportunity to represent the organization. (The consultant secured the necessary formal releases from the kids' families on the use of their names and photos from the event.) The Helping Hands cover, prominently sporting the KAC logo, was enlarged and displayed as a poster. A June 2004 fundraiser hosted by KAC's board chair included the donation of one piece of original Helping Hands artwork for auction.

**Financing** – KAC gained support for the project from the community health foundation funding the report card because the book highlights positive contributions from children and taps into the talents of people from around the state. Because KAC chose to work with consultants and vendors, the total project cost came to \$57,317, including \$26,500 (design & production), \$22,795 (printing), \$5,500 (film and scans), \$1,000 (coordination of stories), and \$1,522 (posters and catering at the book signings).

### **Timeline**

- KAC staff met with its marketing consultant in early spring to determine the format of the book and its integration into the report card distribution and promotion process.
- A lull of 3-4 months over the summer followed for KAC staff, as the marketing consultant contacted schools to place posters and gain commitments from artists.
- Final selections on children's submissions were made by KAC and the consultant in late summer, after which artists were matched as illustrators for the children's work.
- Art and text were ready in the early fall, and sent to the printer in mid-October.
- Distribution and promotion of *Helping Hands* began in early December, and were aligned with the release of the report card.

### **Results**

While *Helping Hands* does not contain a direct advocacy message, it does prominently include KAC's logo, contact information, and a preface emphasizing the fact that all individuals can make a difference to the common good. KAC describes receiving a "phenomenal" response from the public, mostly in the form of a marked increase in requests for information on KAC's work.

Because *Helping Hands'* message remains fresh, KAC has been able to use it to recruit new constituents and major donors. KAC has followed up with recipients in subsequent targeted issue campaigns; its most recent one involves sharing a five-week postcard series on children's health matters (e.g., obesity, oral health, SCHIP, etc.) with the medical professionals originally contacted.

### **Lessons Learned**

- Be mindful of book deadlines. Tracking to the same release date as the report card meant little leeway for problems or delays in the publication process.
- Consider releasing the book prior to the report card. KAC has been able to leverage the book's message beyond its initial link to the annual report card.
- Consider soliciting essays and poems earlier in the school year, in order to gain more teacher encouragement of young writers. An unintended bonus came as the book went to press: a blank page was inserted toward the end, inviting young readers to fill in their own stories.
- Contract with third-party vendors wherever possible, to handle the back-and-forth communications required for each phase of coordination.