

Campaign Title: Coming Soon

Brand: Raising the Roof

Company(s) Involved: Raising the Roof, Leo Burnett Toronto

Category: Transformation

Summary

From apathy to empathy

Last winter, a 54-year-old man was found with no vital signs, wearing only a t-shirt and jeans, on the streets of Toronto. More alarming is the thousands of people that walked right past him, indifferent to his plight. He died later that night.

His death epitomized an ugly truth that social psychologists¹ and charity researchers² know too well: as long as people are not inconvenienced by homelessness, they will be indifferent towards it.

In an effort to raise awareness, the charity Raising-The-Roof put a fake homeless shelter in a place they knew it would raise eyebrows. “*Coming Soon*” was the title of our campaign.

With zero dollars invested in media, *Coming Soon* produced an estimated 7,700,000 unique impressions³, raising awareness for a problem that is often ignored.

¹ Source: Douglas Quan “‘Bystander Apathy’ Common Cause of Overlooking Public Violence”

² Source: John Hallward; Ipsos (2004) “The Creators of Motivation: Advancement in the Exploration of Emotions”

³ Source: Media Agency

Marketing Challenge

The challenge: Generate awareness for long-term solutions to homelessness, in the face of widespread apathy

Homelessness is a huge issue in Canada, with some estimates putting the cost to the Canadian economy at \$7 billion a year. However, the economic costs of homelessness are small compared to the human costs.

On any given year 235,000 Canadians find themselves homeless. Once on the streets, people are 127 times more likely to die an earlier death than the average Canadian . Unable to escape their grim reality, 675 homeless people committed suicide in 2008, a number that is nearly 40 times higher than the Canadian average . And yet, every day, Canadians walk by homeless people, indifferent to their suffering. And even those who do care wrongly believe that short-term solutions like spare change or donations to shelters are a solution to the problem.

Raising The Roof (RTR) needed to make Canadians aware that temporary solutions aren't actually effective. Instead, a focus on long-term, permanent measures, like changes to government policy, are required to put an end to homelessness for good.

Three objectives were identified to measure campaign success:

- 1) Earn free media impressions through coverage in news media
- 2) Put a new conversation about long-term solutions to homelessness into the mainstream
- 3) Drive donations for RTR

Methodology

To truly solve the issue, we needed to understand its causality.

Our primary research focused on understanding the issue from both sides – the homeless people who live the problem, and the social workers and social psychologists trying to solve it⁴. We also leveraged secondary clinical research to understand the psychology behind the causes of homelessness, and the stigmas attached to it^{5,6}.

To help narrow our focus we looked at two very important behaviours that could help us transform apathy into empathy.

1. Their Relationship to Causes and Societal Issues

Behaviour: People's rampant ADD.

In an era of 8s attention spans⁷, people flip-flop from Facebook to YouTube, headline to headline, and one social cause to another. One minute it's Ice Bucket Challenge videos, the next it's updating our Facebook photo for gay rights. It's easier than ever to be involved in everything while actually committing to nothing. It sounds like a destructive path for society but we didn't buy into the negativity. Any demonstration of support and understanding of our cause, however short-lived, would be a good thing.

Action: Design a campaign that causes immediate interruption and evokes an immediate response.

2. Their Relationship to Homelessness

Behaviour: NIMBYism

We're used to seeing the homeless on the side of the street virtually every day. From time to time we offer change or donate to a shelter, but then we quickly move on – believing that we've 'done our bit', making homelessness somebody else's problem⁸. This is why we had to make short-term solutions (like donating to shelters) a personal problem. And that's when we struck on the idea of the

⁴ Source: Leo Burnett Survey: Understanding Youth Homelessness 2010

⁵ Source: "The Relationship Between Contact and Implicit and Explicit Attitudes Toward Homeless People" Carl A. Shoemaker, Humboldt State University (2006)

⁶ Source: Douglas Quan "'Bystander Apathy' Common Cause of Overlooking Public Violence"

⁷ Source: Microsoft attention spans, Spring 2015, Consumer insights, Author: Alyson Gausby

⁸ Source: Leo Burnett Survey for Raising the Roof, 2011

“NIMBY” - Not in My Back Yard – a person who wishes to keep issues at arm’s length.

Action: Make the shortcomings of short-term solutions to homelessness feel closer to home.

Insight: People’s concern for the homeless is surprisingly selfish.

It’s sad but true - people are apathetic when problems are at arm’s length. However, the moment that problem is brought into their backyard, their attitude radically changes. In order to get people talking about long-term solutions for homelessness, we had to force them to experience the inadequacies of short-term solutions for themselves.

Creative Execution

To highlight the inadequacies of short-term solutions, we tapped into NIMBYism (Not in My Back Yard), by staging a hoax. Our goal was to evoke an immediate, visceral response to ensure we successfully reinserted the issue back into social conversation, into a news stream and culture that only pays attention to the extreme and fantastical.

“Homeless Shelter – Coming Soon to Your Neighbourhood!”

We found a property for lease in Leaside, an affluent area of Toronto, and covered its facade with a plywood sign that read: “The Jefferson Homeless Shelter, Opening November 30th”, with a phone number for people to call with questions or concerns.

Our sign had the desired effect. Immediately after posting it, an uproar ensued. People picked up the phone and did the talking for us. This is what they had to say:

“Yes hello, I just got a notice about a new shelter going into my neighborhood and I think it’s an awful idea.”

“There must be some other place a homeless shelter can opened...”

“You know that these are all drug addicts and drunks... You are ruining a perfect neighborhood, it’s absolutely absurd.”

The message was clear – nobody wanted a shelter “in their backyard”.

The first sign was meant to be up for days, but on account of the immediate and powerful response, we put up the second sign after just a few hours, which read: *“You told us you don’t want a shelter here. Neither do we. Support us in creating long-term solutions. Let’s end homelessness.”*

Business Results

Coming Soon helped RTR inject homelessness into mainstream conversation:

1. Earn free media impressions through coverage in news media

The “hoax” caused a media frenzy that reached every major Toronto news outlet and even other parts of the world. We had coverage on HuffingtonPost.ca, BuzzFeed.com, Toronto Star, CP24, Independent.co.uk, and 10 more outlets. The result was an estimated 7,700,000 potential unique impressions with zero dollars invested in media⁹.

By the end of the frenzy, the video earned 52,000 views - obviously not massive compared to other viral videos. However, in context of similar initiatives, a comparable video from United Way, an organization addressing the same societal issues, had 76.5% fewer views. Comparing the scale of the United Way’s annual \$522 million budget¹⁰ to Raising the Roof zero budget, we see this as a huge accomplishment for the brand¹¹.

2. Put a new conversation about long-term solutions to homelessness into the mainstream

Our campaign resurfaced the issue of homelessness at the Provincial and Federal Government policy level¹² where conversation in caucus and in media typically revolves around economic, trade and environmental issues.

3. Drive donations for RTR

In spite of the brevity of our campaign, RTR increased donations 506% vs. PY¹³.

⁹ Source: Media Agency

¹⁰ Source: United Way Canada Annual Report 2015

¹¹ Source: Media Agency

¹² Source: Global News, Homeless shelter hoax has Leaside residents upset

¹³ Source: Client Organization – Raising the Roof