



4501 North Charles St. • Baltimore, MD 21210 • (908)-307-8732 • kcnolan@loyola.edu

Title: Engaging the Baltimore Community for At-Risk Youth

Summary

Acts4Youth, or A4Y, partnered with Game Plan PR to help raise its presence in the Baltimore community; announce its expansion to a third location; increase participation with the Loyola University Maryland community; and, assist in engaging A4Y supporters at its May 2016 banquet. To create successful deliverables that aligned with A4Y's mission, we researched the social ill of at-risk youth, conducted on-site visits and interviewed participants of the program. We assisted A4Y in achieving its goals through media pitches; a press release; a personal invitation with testimonials for Loyola invitees; and, banquet-specific tactics including a video and custom placemats.

Situational and Organizational Analysis

Although the term "at-risk" has no absolute definition, many of Baltimore City's children fit into this category. Data from Advocates for Children and Youth report that one in three kids in Baltimore live in poverty, and by eighth grade 59 percent of students are below the Maryland State Assessment proficiency. The nonprofit A4Y aims to help Baltimore children by providing a strong mentorship program that nurtures personal, social and spiritual wholeness, so they can thrive in their communities.

A4Y is at a critical point in its growth. Since it started in 2008, A4Y has added more grade levels, a girls' program and, most recently, it has partnered with a third school. While A4Y has expanded, it needs to solidify its placement in the community and increase its support. A4Y partnered with Game Plan PR to expand media awareness of



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the organization in Baltimore and grow its involvement with its neighbor Loyola University Maryland, an institution with similar Christian values as A4Y and whose administrators and faculty could provide mentorship to A4Y students.

Research

Background: To serve A4Y, we wanted to understand the social ill of at-risk youth in Baltimore City and how A4Y students fit into this segment. The National Center for Children in Poverty, or NCCP, has a list of risk factors that qualify a child as at-risk, which includes: households without English speakers; families with four or more children; parents who lack a high school degree; moving one or more times in a year; single-parent households; teen mothers; and, unemployed parents. According to the NCCP, if a child fits into a minimum of three risks, then it is likely that the child will experience negative outcomes throughout his or her life. A4Y reports that from the kids it serves, more than 70 percent come from a single-parent household, typically with the head of household being female, and over 40 percent have had at least one adult family member charged with a crime.

As noted, A4Y provides a strong mentorship program for at-risk kids in Baltimore. It is able to differentiate itself from other after-school programs for its spiritual focus and emphasis on the importance of faith. It has been successful in expanding the program by adding grade levels, developing a girls' program and partnering with a third school.



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Although A4Y has been successful in fulfilling its mission and is growing, the organization still has weaknesses and challenges. The nonprofit relies heavily on volunteers and depends on donations to help continue its goals. A challenge presented to Game Plan PR is that A4Y would like more involvement with Loyola University Maryland, which already has many faculty and staff serving with the nonprofit. And while the organization is expanding, there is little exposure about its important work for the community. The website lacks pertinent information, including missing blog posts and inconsistent newsletters. Unfortunately, A4Y has received little-to-no media coverage about its program.

Primary research, including interviews with subject matter experts and visits to the organization, has demonstrated a strong need for increased awareness of what the program does. Members, over time, have greatly benefitted from the mentorship that the program offers. And, now with the program blossoming to include at-risk females as well as a third location, best practices need also be replicated.

Planning

Publics:

- *Media:* A4Y is making great progress developing and nurturing at-risk youth in struggling Baltimore communities through its two successful school partnerships, with a third partnership in process.



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- *Donors:* The A4Y program provides mentorship, personal, social and spiritual development for Baltimore City youth. Through donations, A4Y is able to fulfill its mission to see Baltimore kids thrive within their communities.
- *Loyola Community:* A4Y nurtures a close connection with Loyola University Maryland, which has generously offered service-learning and sporting event opportunities. As an institution that values being men and women for and with others, Loyola holds unique privilege in lifting those within its reach.

Goals:

- Increase public awareness about the expansion of A4Y
- Design visual materials for A4Y's May 26 banquet
- Expand Loyola University Maryland administrators and faculty's involvement with A4Y

Objectives:

- Increase local awareness of at-risk youth and their needs
- Create interactive materials that relay the A4Y mission for the banquet
- Confirm 10 relevant Loyola community members to attend the banquet

Strategies:

- Determine relevant media contacts and outlets to send press release
- Create a press release about A4Y's new school partnership
- Interview and take pictures of students who participate in A4Y to use for banquet materials



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- Research Loyola faculty and administrators who might be interested in learning more about A4Y
- Send personalized invitations to at least 50 Loyola community members to the banquet

Tactics:

- Prepare a media list with five Tier A journalists and 11 Tier B journalists
- Write six pitches for and pitch the news release to five Tier A journalists and 11 Tier B journalists
- Write a press release, also creating an evergreen press release template with boilerplate
- Incorporate images and video clips into a three-to-five minute video
- Create table materials for banquet, including a placemat
- Research 50 select Loyola members to invite to the banquet
- Produce a personal invitation letter with three quotes to distribute to 50 select Loyola members

Execution

To achieve our goals, we produced the following tactics over the course of 14 weeks:

- *Press Release:* Informed the public about A4Y's mission and expanding program through a press release. It provided details of the nonprofit's expansion at Garrett Heights Elementary/Middle School and the success of A4Y so far.



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- *Video:* After drafting interview questions and interviewing 20 participants, produced a video highlighting A4Y participants' hopes for the future and what they enjoy about the program. This video will be one of the visual materials at the May 2016 banquet to engage guests with the organization.
- *Placemat:* Designed a placemat for each table setting at the banquet. There are five different versions that each highlight an A4Y participant. Similar to the video, this placemat shares the participants' hopes and connects the guests to the program.
- *Personal Invitation:* After researching and strategically selecting 50 Loyola faculty and staff members with potential interest in A4Y, composed an individual invitation. These invitations helped A4Y reach out to Loyola stakeholders to gain future involvement from the institution.
- *Testimonials:* To accompany the invitation letter, three testimonials were secured.
- *Media Email Pitches:* After creating a ghost email account, pitched to local media outlets the expansion of A4Y in a new school and its evolving programs.

Evaluation

Over the course of the 14 weeks, Game Plan PR faced different challenges. If we had the opportunity to serve again with A4Y, we perhaps would not have taken on so many tasks, such as producing the video, since we had minimal video skills. We also would take more care to stick with our schedule to produce deliverables on time. Still, we



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feel confident in the quantity and the quality of deliverables produced for A4Y, so this nonprofit can continue to work toward achieving its mission.

Game Plan PR has assisted A4Y in the first steps of contacting local media and has written a press release about the program's expansion that is ready to be used when needed. We have also prepared personalized letters for Loyola's administration and faculty as a follow up to the invitation. For the banquet, we have created five unique placemats featuring A4Y participants to engage attendees. In addition, a four-minute video has been produced not only for the banquet, but also to be used in A4Y promotional materials. Because the banquet is not until May 26, 2016, and RSVPs are still being collected, we are unable to determine how many Loyola members are attending the event. However, since all deliverables have been adopted by A4Y, the campaign to assist the nonprofit is judged a success.