

Social Marketing Can Be an Effective Sustainability Tool

From the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's (SAMHSA's) Caring for Every Child's Mental Health Campaign

System of care grantee communities interested in the effectiveness of social marketing to strengthen their sustainability can find inspiration in the example set by Wraparound Orange in Florida. In this time of budget cuts, it is rare for grantees to win a pledge of \$1 million for children's mental health from a local government, and even rarer to do it for three years running, but Wraparound Orange did just that, using strategic social marketing to support their case for funding.

Wraparound Orange persuaded Orange County, FL, to provide \$1 million in Year 4 of its six-year cooperative agreement, and another \$1 million in Year 5; they expect to ask for the same in Year 6. It didn't take any kind of special magic; instead, it took using the precepts of social marketing, communicating to their audiences why they should care about their continued wraparound service delivery model for children, youth, and their families.

Social marketing applies the principles and techniques of marketing consumer products—anything from shampoo to hammers—to “marketing” behavior change in a way that benefits society. Effective sustainability strategies that benefit from social marketing, as documented by Beth Stroul and Gary Blau,¹ include:

- cultivating strong interagency relationships;
- involving stakeholders;
- establishing a strong family organization;
- using evaluation results; and
- creating an ongoing focal point for managing the system of care.

Because the audience (the group you want to “sell” your ideas to) is going to be at differing stages of buy-in, social marketers tailor their message to include the most persuasive reason for each audience member. In the case of Wraparound Orange, they say that they first developed

¹ Stroul, B., & Blau, G. M. (2008). *The system of care handbook: Transforming mental health services for children, youth, and families*. Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co.: Baltimore, MD.

Social Marketing Can Be an Effective Sustainability Tool

a good “elevator speech” (see sidebar at right), and the consistency of that message was crucial in all of their outreach.

Wraparound Orange’s key message was that their service delivery methods work; how that message was delivered took into account the needs of the specific audience.

Social marketers know that audiences want to hear “what’s in it for me.” By positioning itself as the solution to what their audience members needed, Wraparound Orange has used social marketing as a key tool for sustainability and funding.

The group took a “top-down, bottom-up” approach, according to Project Director Anne Marie Sheffield. The top-down approach involved meeting with decision-makers to demonstrate the efficacy of the wraparound model. The bottom-up approach involved positioning Wraparound Orange as a problem-solver in the community.

Wraparound focused on youth ages 12 and under who had been arrested. Small successes in reducing arrest rates locally, paired with an overall decline in arrest rates nationwide, began to catch the attention of those who could help. Wraparound Orange leveraged these successes to start the conversation about the importance of their service delivery model at the administrative level and beyond.

Part of that problem-solving involved offering Wraparound Orange as a partner in writing proposals. “When you say to someone, ‘I can make your grant application stronger and I don’t want your money,’ that’s a good thing,” Sheffield says.

Wraparound Orange makes sure that all stakeholders are represented in its committees, and it

Prepare your message

A good **elevator speech** should contain your major message and should be enticing enough to get someone to listen. It should also be short – so named because it can be delivered to a captive audience in an elevator between stops. Include a clear introduction. Think of it like a movie trailer: It should give the listener enough information to know the basics and tell them why they should be interested, but leave them wanting more. And it should always end with a way they can reach you for more information. Give them your card or take theirs so you can continue the conversation later.

Social Marketing Can Be an Effective Sustainability Tool

presents itself as the solution to others' needs, eliciting invitations to conferences, committees, and trainings. For instance, Wraparound Orange offers trained family speakers to local conferences looking for such expertise; it offers training for law enforcement in what to do when encountering someone experiencing a mental health crisis; and it offers training for school psychologists and counselors. This outreach has led to key alliances with the Orange County mayor and a circuit court judge who has become a proponent of Wraparound Orange.

Once the system of care found a message that resonated with each audience, it learned a key social marketing lesson: Once is not enough.

"You have to find the leaders who are interested and who are listening, and then, you take every single opportunity to talk about what you are doing. Never give up," Sheffield says. "The first year, we had 10 committees that met every month, and I'd have to be cognizant of repeating the same information over and over. I would be surprised after a year and a half that people still didn't understand. It made me understand that our role is to share that information, because people aren't eating and breathing this every day like we are. It's our responsibility to keep repeating the message until they get it."

In summary, here are the key concepts to using social marketing as a sustainability strategy:

- Figure out what your story is and make sure everyone on your team knows it and can tell it. For Wraparound Orange, that story was that they were the solution to whatever issue their audience faced.
- Hone the story into an "elevator speech" so that you can tell your story even if you only have a few moments with an important stakeholder.
- Meet with people at all levels of your community and make sure you get sufficient representation from them on your committees. Wraparound Orange's "top-down, bottom-up" approach helped it saturate the community with its message.
- Position your system of care as a problem solver. Rather than asking for help, Wraparound Orange took the attitude that it could help others, including training law enforcement.

Social Marketing Can Be an Effective Sustainability Tool

- Once is not enough. Keep repeating your message until it sinks in. Wraparound Orange found that their message didn't necessarily resonate with audiences right away, and needed several tries to get across.

SAMHSA's Caring for Every Child's Mental Health Campaign was created in 1994 with the mission to increase awareness around children's mental health. The Caring for Every Child's Mental Health Campaign team works to support SAMHSA-funded sites through the strategic use of social marketing and communications strategies. The team is a partnership among the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), the National Association of Mental Health Program Directors, Vanguard Communications, and the National Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health.