

THESIS

WHO'S WATCHING THE DOOR? A CRITICAL EXAMINATION OF THE PRACTICE OF UTILIZING  
YOUTH/CLIENTS IN NON-PROFIT MARKETING MATERIALS

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## ABSTRACT

### WHO'S WATCHING THE DOOR? A CRITICAL EXAMINATION OF THE PRACTICE OF UTILIZING YOUTH/CLIENTS IN NON-PROFIT MARKETING MATERIALS

Youth-serving non-profit organizations will often utilize youth/clients in their marketing materials, in the form of testimonials and case studies. This usage has the potential to increase both donations and volunteerism, two critical areas of need for organizational success. But, particularly with the advent of new marketing opportunities through new media, where access to those stories has increased, the rules are potentially changing and organizations must deliberate between two competing interests: the need for money and volunteers, and the need to protect their clients from harm outright. This qualitative research examined how organizations handle those competing interests by interviewing both social workers and public relations practitioners regarding their use of youth/clients in their organizational marketing materials. While examining their unique experiences, it was found that many organizations have policies in place that unnecessarily subject their youth to harm.

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## Chapter I – Introduction

Before entering graduate school, I was the Community Relations Manager for a youth mentoring agency. I was in that role for four years, doing all of the organizational marketing and public relations, and a large portion of my job was to present the stories/testimonials of the youth and mentors in our program. As a large part of the overall marketing plan, these stories/testimonials allowed our non-profit organization to raise more money for the program, as well as to get more mentors involved with the youth who were on the waiting list for services – two very important things for a non-profit seeking to serve the community at large.

At the mid-point of my third year, one of the case managers, a registered member of the National Association of Social Workers (NASW), had just returned from an NASW regional meetings in Denver. In that meeting, she asked a panel of NASW members what they thought about utilizing youth/clients in marketing campaigns. The answer she received, to her, seemed absolute: youth-serving organizations should *never* use a real client, a youth, in any marketing materials, and to do so was unethical. Furthermore, the social worker who attended the conference communicated to our organization that to do so was to be in violation of the NASW code of ethics, and any social worker caught using such materials could potentially be subject to punitive damages – including a potential loss of license for individuals who were Licensed Clinical Social Workers.

The reasons given for this position were numerous. First, when dealing with a client, which any youth served through the program would be considered, there is no way for a representative of the organization to ask the youth to be in marketing materials without the possibility of coercion. Services are being provided to the youth by the organization, and as

such, the youth, and adults responsible for them, would potentially feel obligated to say yes, for fear of having those services taken away if they declined, even if that concern was unfounded. Second, organizations could not predict potential harm that could happen as a result of youth being used in marketing materials. The third issue was decision-making capacity. In a vulnerable population, the social workers doubted the youth and their caretakers were in a good position to make decisions that took into account that potential for harm. Lastly, and tied to decision-making capacity, was informed consent. If the families and youth lacked an appropriate level of decision-making capacity, informed consent ceased to matter, even if they signed a waiver stating they understood the nature of the request and the potential consequences. In addition to these apprehensions, there was an expression of concern for the 'power relationship' between social workers and their clients. Being in a position of power, social workers have an immense responsibility to protect their client relationships to the best of their ability. These concerns become even greater when dealing with youth, who are considered to fall within a vulnerable population.

After a series of meetings within the organization I worked for, which had three full-time social workers under employ, leadership decided to cease usage of organizational youth in marketing materials, a position I, in full disclosure, was against. At that time, I believed that we had taken appropriate measures to ensure those stories were used in an ethical manner, consistent with much larger organizations who served similar roles in their communities. I believed it sufficient that waivers had been signed, no identifying information beyond first names had ever been used, and that we had chosen the youth very carefully, ensuring they were appropriate for the projects we were working on. Furthermore, through perceived

increases in volunteerism and donations, it had been loosely shown that the public connected with the stories. Ultimately, it was my belief that those two factors contributed to more youth served throughout the county the organization served. At the time, I didn't understand why the organization had chosen to stop, even knowing that organizations must strike a delicate balance between traditional marketing/development concerns and those of the program.

After leaving that organization to pursue my graduate degree full-time, I realized that I continued to have a great interest in this subject, and decided to study the topic to see, through research, what I could find, particularly with the growth of social media. It made sense that social media serves to give increased access to organizational materials and messages and, thus, could increase the potential for harm. Ethical questions regarding the use of youth in marketing materials could potentially grow larger in the coming years, as more people have access to the stories non-profits choose to display. So, many questions still lingered in my mind, unsatisfied. How do other non-profits handle this issue? Is it ethical to use youth in organizational marketing materials? And if they are used, what harm are they potentially exposed to? If there is potential for harm, how do you balance that with the need to market an effective program? And, ultimately, who makes the decisions on whether or not the practice of utilizing youth in marketing materials is ethical or not? How are those power relationships distributed throughout an organization?

An initial information-seeking interview with Renee Rivera, Executive Director of the Colorado Chapter of the National Association of Social Workers, yielded some interesting results. According to Ms. Rivera, the above questions are important issues currently attracting a lot of buzz throughout the non-profit industry, again, particularly with the increased use of

social media (Rivera, personal communication, 3/15/2011). Surprisingly, she stated that a great many non-profits have no policy in place regarding the utilization of youth in their marketing materials, choosing to just ‘wing it.’ This is of particular concern for the NASW, because of their distinct call to protect their clients from harm wherever possible – youth in this case – and organizations are not taking clear measures to keep them from harm. The clear cry throughout the interview with Ms. Rivera was for organizational commitment to creating *informed* policy regarding the use of youth in marketing materials. Policy that moves beyond the need for organizations to make money, instead taking into account the youth who are being served, and the delicate power relationship that the social workers enter into when serving youth in a professional capacity. For Ms. Rivera, social workers have an ethical responsibility to serve the client, first and foremost, above and beyond all other interests.

In the interview, there was an interesting differentiation between clinical and non-clinical settings, though. In a clinical setting, the issue, for the NASW, is black and white: youth are not to be used in materials. There is no possibility to navigate the confidentiality issues that arise in that specific context. But for organizations serving youth in less clinical environments, such as youth mentoring programs, the issue falls into a grey area. There is a need to serve the client’s interest by providing them services, and effectively marketing the program plays a vital role in that. She believed there to be sufficient room for using testimonials, but that it had to be done intentionally and carefully. And the interests of marketing needed to be coupled with an intrinsic need to protect a vulnerable client (personal communication with Renee Rivera, 3/15/2011).

The purpose of this research was to dive fully into that grey area, to find out how organizations navigate the need to promote their program, while at the same time keeping in mind the vulnerable nature of the clients it serves. Through in-depth interviews with both public relations practitioners/marketing professionals working at non-profit organizations, as well as social workers, this study attempts to find answers that will help aid organizations as they deliberate how to market their programs effectively, while, at the same time, creating policy that protects the interest of their youth. In doing this, the hope of this study is to help youth-serving non-profit organizations to create *informed* policy, filling the perceived gap that is apparent throughout the non-profit industry in this area.



## **Chapter II – Literature Review**

### **New Media and Non-Profits**

As of June 30, 2010, the world boasted a total of 1,966,514,816 Internet users (Internet World Stats, 2010). With 6.8 billion people worldwide, that represents 28.7% of the total population, representing a 444.8% growth since 2000 (Internet World Stats, 2010). In North America, there are 266,244,500 Internet users, representing 77.4% of the total population of 344,157,450, a 146.3% growth since 2000. (Internet World Stats, 2010). Grunig (2009) states, “A huge proportion of the world’s population now has access to and is using digital media, and usage in developing countries is catching up to that in developed countries” (p.3).

Internet technologies are impacting how people interact worldwide, as they increasingly utilize rapidly advancing technology to communicate. Organizations concerned with staying in touch with their key stakeholders are now forced to keep up to date with new technology as well. Hallahan (2006) states, “Web sites, e-mail, bulletin boards, newsgroups, chat rooms, and wireless telecommunications are now potent forces that must be reckoned with – and are being adroitly used by organizations ranging from loosely organized social movements to large Establishment organizations” (p. 108).

Facebook is a good example of how organizations can attempt to maintain relationships with current/potential stakeholders through Internet technologies. With more than 500 million active users utilizing Facebook (Facebook, 2011), organizations want to tap into the relationship potential it offers, to meet people where they congregate. In April, 2006, Facebook began allowing organizations to register for accounts, and within the first two weeks, over 4,000 organizations joined, seeking to connect with the average of 250,000 people registering on

Facebook daily (Waters, Burnett, Lamm, & Lucas, 2009). Hird (2010) found that, by 2010, the number of organizations signed up for Facebook had increased to over 700,000 (as cited in Briones, Kuch, Fisher, & Jin, 2011).

While many of these practitioners use new media technology in the same way they used traditional media – merely dumping messages onto the general public (Grunig, 2009) – public relations practitioners can seek to use the digital technologies for much more. Whitehouse (2010) states, “Digital media and social networks provide powerful opportunities to exchange vital information, seek sources, correct errors, and create audience interconnectivity” (p. 310). Hallahan (2009) posits that digital media and social networks not only promote dialogue between an organization and its constituents, but can also facilitate conversations among members of stakeholder groups themselves. Social media platforms, in particular, are impacting the way in which conversations take place. Wright and Hinson (2009) states:

Social media has had a staggering impact on the practice of public relations since the first weblogs, or blogs, appeared more than a dozen years ago. This has continued and increased as social media developed into a number of different forms including text, images, audio and video through the development of forums, message boards, photo sharing, podcasts RSS (really simple syndication), search engine marketing, video sharing, Wikis, social networks, professional networks and micro-blogging sites. (p. 2)

Grunig (2009) states that 51% of public relations departments in the United States are now responsible for digital communication, 48% for social networking, and 52% for microblogging (text messaging, instant messaging, and Twitter).

Social media provide organizations with a place to interact with key stakeholders, allowing engagement with one another on likeminded areas of interests (Bortree & Seltzer, 2009). It enables public relations practitioners to reach out and engage their specific publics in

conversations easily (Eyrich, Padman, & Sweetser, 2008), a positive change in communication habits. Wright and Hinson (2009) state, "Social media deliver web-based information created by people with the intention of facilitating communication and now represents one of the world's major sources of social interaction as people share stories and experiences with each other" (p. 5). And public relations practitioners see opportunity in social networks to develop those relationships. Nielsen (2009) states:

The interactive features of the Internet and blogosphere have become a staple in society, with two-thirds of the world's Internet population having visited a social networking or blogging site, and the time spent on these sites growing at more than three times the rate of overall growth. The interactive nature of social media makes them helpful tools for public relations practitioners. (website)

People are increasingly a part of the conversations they want to be involved in, now developing relationships with the organizations they follow.

In addition to increased communication and relationship building potential, one of the critical benefits of these new digital mediums is that they come with low financial cost. Wright and Hinson (2009) state, "respondents give social media high marks for offering organizations low-cost ways to develop relationships with members of various strategic publics..." (p. 12-13). This is a benefit to organizations that work with low budgets, particularly non-profit and advocacy agencies. Hallahan (2006) states, "The Internet has transformed the techniques and technology of advocacy by enabling individuals and organizations with relatively modest resources to reach a global audience instantaneously twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week" (p. 108).

## **Non-profit use of Social Media**

Bronstein (2006) states, "Non-profit organizations occupy an important place in American society" (p. 71). Non-profits are commonly referred to as the 'third sector,' after business and government, and they typically include charitable organizations, social welfare groups, labor and agriculture unions, business leagues, social and political clubs, and other groups that attempt to serve the public interest (Bronstein, 2006, p. 71). But, while their causes serve the public interest, most non-profit organizations have fewer economic resources at their disposal than business and government organizations, which hinders public relations programs that are often times expensive (Bronstein, 2006). Bronstein (2006) found that just 26% of all non-profit organizations earn more than \$25,000 per year. With the effectiveness of public relations campaigns often dictated by the amount of money spent on them, well-financed corporate and government elites have tended to exert more influence over the norms and values established through long-term media exposure, making it difficult for non-profit and advocacy groups to consistently influence media coverage (Bronstein, 2006). But new Internet technologies have begun to level the playing field.

But new technology, such as social media, is now giving non-profit organizations greater ability to contribute to the marketplace of ideas (Bronstein, 2006). Hovey (2010) states, "Social media can help nonprofits share the work of publicity and advocacy with volunteers and be open with organizational information." Social media give non-profit organizations a cost-effective way to reach a vast audience, making them visible to large numbers of people. Barnes (2010) writes, "The adoption of social media by charities is being driven by familiarity and their recognition of the increasingly important role of social media in today's world." Bronstein

(2006) states, “They are using the Internet to bring their social causes and concerns, such as deforestation, gun control, and music education, before the world, and to assert a more forceful presence in the public sphere” (p. 72). Hovey (2010) states:

For nonprofit organizations, social media sites, such as blogs and Facebook offer new ways to engage publics in activism, publicity, and fundraising. Additionally, social media sites are often inexpensive – if not free – to use and require only basic computer skills. These aspects make social media seemingly ideal for many nonprofit managers who are limited in time and resources. (website)

The low cost allows non-profits to have increased access to the publics they need to be successful, with most of the cost coming not in money, but in time and effort.

In a survey of 78 charity executives, Barnes (2010) found that social media has become an increasingly important part of communication strategies for non-profit organizations, and also that they have a commitment to utilizing the tools available to them. Ninety-nine percent of the respondents reported social media as very important to increasing awareness of their mission. According to the survey, for the first time in the four years the study has been conducted, 100% of those interviewed are using at least one form of social media. Ninety-seven percent of the charities studied have a Facebook profile, 96% have a Twitter account, and 64% utilize blogs. Additionally, 93% of respondents reported that they monitor the Internet for buzz, posts, conversations and updates regarding their organization (Barnes, 2010).

These sites also help with both the recruitment and evaluation of volunteers, with 75% of the executives believing the social networking sites were instrumental in those processes (Barnes, 2010). Barnes (2010) states, “It appears that there is a significant amount of effort now expended in an effort to recruit employees or volunteers as well as to evaluate potential recruits.” The top performing non-profits, overwhelmingly, saw the role of social media as most

important in increasing awareness of their mission (90%) and, to a lesser extent (50%), generating donations. Their strategy appears to be one of promoting their cause through blogs, video, and social networking sites (Barnes, 2010). Blogs, for example, have become a focal point in non-profit Internet usage. Barnes (2010) finds that, while the Fortune 500, Inc. 500, U.S. colleges and universities, and charities have all increased their adoption of blogging between 2007 and 2010, charities out-blog all sectors for the fourth year in a row. Bronstein (2006) states, "An increasing number of nonprofits are maintaining their Internet presence through blogs, interactive online journals that allow organizations to post information, commentary, and links to other pages of interest, and that contain forums for readers to post their own comments to create a continuing conversation" (p. 74).

There are many examples of non-profit organizations utilizing social media with great effect. The National Peace Corps Association, a Washington, D.C.-based non-profit supporting former volunteers and the Peace Corps community, has used social media to recruit 21,600 members to their site, helping support 140 groups focused on their countries of service (Quain, 2010). The University of California at San Francisco Medical Center launched an online fundraising competition that used social media –primarily Facebook and Twitter – to find new donors, and also recruit new advocates for their new children's hospital (Galloro, 2011). Along with raising awareness and visibility for the project, they secured \$1 million in donations through their efforts (Galloro, 2011). The American Red Cross uses a variety of tools such as websites, blogs, Twitter, and Facebook to develop relationships focused on recruiting and maintaining volunteers, updating communities on disaster preparedness and response, and engaging the media (Briones, et al., 2011). The utilization of these tools has enabled them to

provide faster service for the community, has generated more media coverage, and has allowed them to receive and respond to both positive and negative community feedback (Briones et al., 2011). Briones et al. (2011) quote an American Red Cross employee, who stated, “It’s actually better, we get more response from our postings on Facebook and Twitter than our more traditional – even from the chapter’s main website” (p. 39).

But, while there can be a “gold rush” mentality to flock to the new technology and get their messages out, non-profits actually need to slow down so they can figure out what will be promising in the end (The Nonprofit Times, 2011). Bronstein (2006) states, “For nonprofit practitioners, many of whom are passionate about the causes they represent, the temptation to do or say whatever is necessary to draw attention to an issue can prevail, even if it means overstepping the boundaries of responsible advocacy” (p. 76). Tactics need to be examined in full, not only to generate more users, but to ensure that the new technology is being used ethically. Practitioners who use irresponsible tactics weaken the organizations they attempt to serve (Bronstein, 2006). Bronstein (2006) continues, “Although this can require enormous personal restraint when practitioners hold passionate beliefs about such issues as animal rights or public smoking bans, responsible advocacy demands that practitioners prioritize the organization’s reputation and relationships with its publics” (p. 72).

Through the excitement of digital media and the potential gains it can bring, practitioners must not forget the ethical implications that could potentially arise through its use. Bazerman and Tenbrunsel (2011, April, p.A27) warn, “When we are busy focused on common organizational goals, like quarterly earnings or sales quotas, the ethical implications of important decisions can fade from our minds. Through this ethical fading, we end up engaging

in or condoning behavior that we would condemn if we were consciously aware of it.” The benefits of social media are obvious, and non-profit organizations will most likely only continue utilizing them to greater effect, once they figure out how. But the ethical considerations need to, *at the very least*, keep pace with the innovations, particularly when people are passionate about their causes, and the help that digital media can bring to them. Bazerman and Tenbrunsel (2011, April, p.A27) continue, “When we fail to notice that a decision has an ethical component, we are able to behave unethically while maintaining a positive self-image. No wonder, then, that our research continues to show that people consistently believe themselves to be more ethical than they are.” This is a position that non-profit organizations cannot afford to be in.

### **Ethical Considerations**

As digital media restructures the very nature of public relations, practitioners need to be sure they are advancing their ethical radars, as well, to keep up with the new technology. According to Hallahan (2006), once messages are created the sheer speed in which those messages are distributed, stored, duplicated, and redistributed poses a great challenge for communicators. Lieber (2005) states, “The stakes arguably reside at unprecedented levels for strategic communicators, as the aftershocks of an ethical mishap now resonate both worldwide and synchronously” (p.290). Hallahan (2006) states, “Clearly, the Internet is here to stay as a fixture in modern life, and organizations and users alike must adapt to the changing technologies. Both must learn and develop trust about new ways of communicating while discerning what constitutes ethical practice” (p. 129).



Whitehouse (2010) defines social media systems themselves as “very dynamic ecosystems” that “constantly evolve” (p. 315). And defining what is ethical can be very difficult in this constantly evolving environment (Hallahan, 2006). Leach (2009) states, “As media evolve so, too, will ethical guidelines” (p. 42). But that process will not happen by itself. It requires diligent public relations practitioners who are willing to take the lead, exemplifying ethical behavior for the entire organization, to both internal and external audiences (Hallahan, 2006). Ward (2010) writes, “Rather than decrying these changes in ethics, we should get ahead of the curve. We should be forward-looking, ethically speaking, and seek to channel these new expansive discussions toward ethical ends” (p.37).

An all-encompassing definition of ethics can be hard to pin down. For the purpose of this research, Ward and Wasserman (2010) give an adequate definition when they state, “We use ‘ethics’ to mean systems of ethical norms and principles intended to guide the conduct of people, such as the members of a profession...” (p. 276). These guidelines should be well-thought-out, and give guidance to public relations practitioners as they navigate the world of digital media, particularly as public relations ethics is receiving increased attention from practitioners and management (Lee & Cheng, 2011). Hallahan (2006) states, “As an activity that inherently attempts to influence people’s behavior – what they know, how they feel, and why they act – public relations practice is inextricably intertwined with ethics” (p 129). He believes that, as organizational behavior is constantly called into question, practitioners must strive for professionalism and high standards of practice, particularly in online environments (Hallahan, 2006). Ethics should play an integral role in the day-to-day operations of public relations practitioners, particularly in light of the fact that modern public relations is focused on the

development of relationships, of initiating and sustaining people's attitudinal and behavioral changes (Lee & Cheng, 2011). Ethical missteps now impact strategic relationships between stakeholders and organizations, hurting trust.

McCleneghan (2005) states, "'Accountability' is the core of professional public relations practice: It is the responsibility of public relations practitioners everywhere to help business and non-profits ensure 'accountability' on all levels" (p. 19). By working hard at making wise ethical decisions, and subsequently being accountable to those decisions, public trust can be gained.

McCleneghan (2005) writes:

Public trust – from both my internal and external publics – is everything. Without it, the organization quite likely could cease to exist; or, at a minimum, will function only marginally effectively. If we do not perform our mission responsibly and with integrity, our support will be withdrawn and our leaders replaced. (p. 20)

While it is unlikely to find complete agreement across the wide range of ethical discourse, digital consumers, at the very least, need to be assured that public relations practitioners are thinking hard about the issues (Leach, 2009). And also that organizations are accountable for their actions and considerations. And those considerations are typically viewed by public relations practitioners in the much larger scope of universal ethics (Lee, 2011). Lieber (2008) found that, "On a fundamental level, public relations scholars and practitioners traditionally define ethical conduct as one that simultaneously satisfies three distinct duties: duty to self, client and society" (p. 244).

While any non-absolute ethical system is vague in nature, creating some principles that recognize certain contexts can make the application of ethical principles more workable (Whitehouse, 2010). Citing Nissenbaum, Whitehouse (2010) writes, "A flippant response to complex ethical questions often is: it depends. Nissenbaum suggests a more productive

response: On what does it depend?" (p. 312-313). This question is an important one for public relations practitioners, as the particular actors and situations must be fully considered, in their proper context, to gain a deep understanding of the stakes (Whitehouse, 2010). This allows for informed decision making. For youth-serving non-profit organizations, how policy effects the youth they serve could be considered one answer to the question, "on what does it depend?"

This is heavily grounded in the works of Immanuel Kant. At the core of this is the notion that, as autonomous agents, individuals have a duty to act morally. Plaisance (2009) states, "At the core of this system is the claim that our human capacity for reason enables us to know these duties and that freedom enables us to act on them" (p. 8). As opposed to a *teleological* approach (utilitarianism), the end result is not the primary concern. What really matters is an individual's responsibility to act in accordance to duty, with well-thought-out reasons and rationale for their decisions. And other people are the primary concern in this decision making. Plaisance (2009) states, "This universal moral obligation requires that we do not treat individuals as ends in themselves and never solely as means to attain other goals or desires we may have" (p. 8-9). Taking care of people, as a duty, is the end goal of all decisions.

This duty to other people should take into account their well-being, particularly as information is so rapidly disseminated in today's digital environment. Spence and Quinn (2008) state, "Information must not be disseminated in ways that violate people's fundamental rights to freedom and well being (i.e. generic rights), individually or collectively, or undermine their capacity for self fulfillment (i.e. negative rights)" (p. 268). All decisions related to media usage must allow for, and promote, the individual's self fulfillment, particularly when those rights cannot be secured or promoted by the individuals themselves (Spence & Quinn, 2008). By

keeping in mind that people are not ends, but means in and of themselves, and keeping their good in mind, public relations practitioners are more naturally going to stand for principles that respect the inherent rights of other people. Bronstein (2006) states, “As nonprofit organizations initiate more complex programs reaching larger numbers of individuals, new questions about ethical public relations practices and the interests that practitioners ought to serve must be answered” (p. 72). The populations must be first and foremost in their minds, to ensure that no mistakes are made. This is particularly the case when non-profits are serving youth, and especially when they choose to highlight youth in their marketing materials with the goal of increasing charitable giving and volunteerism.

### **Charitable Giving**

In 2010, Americans gave more than \$290.89 billion to their favorite charities, despite the current economic conditions (“Giving Statistics”, n.d.). This total giving, when adjusted for inflation, was up 3.8 percent from 2009, with the slight increase being attributed to recovering economic confidence (“Giving Statistics”, n.d.). The greatest amount of charitable giving, \$211.77 billion, was given by individuals or household donors, which represents 73 percent of all contributed dollars, again, a slight increase from the 2009 numbers (“Giving Statistics”, n.d.). In addition, charitable bequests, made by individuals as well, accounted for \$22.83 billion, which is an additional 8 percent given by individuals, bringing the total amount of donations dollars given by individuals to \$234.6 billion, or 81 percent of total charitable giving (“Giving Statistics”, n.d.). Even with all of the money being donated, it’s still a competitive landscape for charitable organizations needing to increase money gained through contributions.

Effectively attracting individuals' donations through advertising has become an important subject in charity marketing (Chang & Lee, 2010). With the vast array of social issues that charities attempt to alleviate, these funds are important in helping combat the causes that charities attempt to lend aid with. To that end, Chang and Lee (2010) suggest that figuring out how to secure more dollars and attract more funds for their causes should be a pressing issue for charity marketers. This is particularly important as individuals typically give to causes that support what they value and believe in, and giving percentages are relatively consistent year to year, with only minor shifts ("Giving Statistics", n.d.). It is important that marketers connect individuals who believe in their cause, *to* their cause, to ensure that these individuals lend financial aid to issues they believe in. This goal should prompt marketers to think creatively, trying to connect with people in as many giving categories that can be related to programs ("Giving Statistics", n.d.).

In an effort to facilitate connections between donors and volunteers, U.S. non-profit organizations spend \$7.6 billion a year in marketing efforts (Small & Verrochi, 2009, citing Watson, 2006). This money is spent in an attempt to seek out additional money amongst a group of potential donors that is currently more sophisticated, discriminating, and selecting in their giving than ever before (Smith & Berger, 2009). Modern donors prefer to have deeper relationships with organizations they choose to give to (Milne and Gordon, 1993), and that causes organizations to attempt to create materials that deepen those relationships. The most effective organizations have done this by seeking out new and improved development strategies that help build a more compelling case for giving in light of a more competitive

fundraising environment (“Giving Statistics”, n.d.). These ideas are typically predicated on a few factors, including:

- Highlighting the consequences of not supporting their particular cause
- Improving communications with donors through regular announcements and communications
- Partnering with other organizations to raise visibility, broadening the audience
- Improving efforts to gain small annual gifts and acknowledging those gifts within a few days
- Increasing advocacy work and drawing attention to need and crisis
- Shifting priorities from fundraising for specific groups to fundraising for specific problems or needs (“Giving Statistics”, n.d.)

While all are considered viable strategies when attempting to secure more stakeholders, with more buy-in, to an organization, the last two, in particular, stand out for this study. How organizations can draw more and better attention to their particular need/crisis, and how moving from more general populations and ideas to more specific ones has been shown to be an effective form of communication.

### **Role of guilt**

One method that helps non-profit organizations draw increased attention to needs and crises amongst potential donors is to create feelings of empathy and guilt, a method that, over time, has proven to be highly successful. These highly emotional appeals are used to cut through the clutter other messages can be thick with, and are shown to be highly popular,

particularly in social marketing contexts (Chang, 2011). Three factors influence charitable behaviors in general: sense of social responsibility, empathy, and awareness and knowledge of the non-profit organizations, with empathy being the only psychographic variable to effect charitable donations (Lee & Chang, 2007). Lee and Chang (2007) state, “The higher a participant rated himself/herself as empathetic, the more likely it was that he/she would opt for donation money” (p. 1177). It is increasingly important for non-profit organizations to build empathy with audiences, aiding in the development and fostering of charitable intentions. When attempting to trigger empathetic feelings, guilt is considered to be a key factor. Hibbert and Smith (2007) state, “Predicated guilt was found to have a significant effect on donation intentions” (p. 737). In fact, dramatic appeals featuring guilt are increasingly being used to grab attention (Hibbert, et al., 2007, citing Moore & Harris, 1996). In addition to increased donation intentions, messages containing similar feelings have also been shown to have an effect on volunteering, with family loading, awareness and knowledge of non-profits, sense of social responsibility, and empathy creating positive associations with the likelihood of volunteering (Lee & Chang, 2007).

Hibbert, et al. (2007) show that guilt arousal is positively related to donation intention, and that persuasion and agent knowledge impact the extent of guilt aroused. It is the arousal of these guilt emotions that influences attitude, which, in turn, *can* have a positive effect on behavior (Hibbert, et al., 2007). Burnett and Lunsford (1994) state:

Previous studies in the areas of clinical psychology, social psychology and sociology have found guilt is playing a vital role in behavioral tendencies (Bozinoff and Ghingold, 1983; Darlington and Macker, 1966; Freedman et al., 1967; Ghingold, 1980; Konoske et al. 1979). Defined as a violation (or an anticipated violation) of one’s internal standards, guilt provides explanations for compliant and altruistic behavior. (p. 33)

There are typically three different types of guilt identified by the literature: reactive guilt, anticipatory guilt, and existential guilt (Huhmann & Brotherton, 1997).

Reactive guilt occurs when one's own standards of acceptable behavior are infringed, e.g., failing to point out that an item has been missed off the bill at a restaurant (Hibbert, et al., 2007). Anticipatory guilt refers to guilt that is experienced when one considers going against one's own standards of acceptable behavior, e.g., planning to call in to work sick when not actually sick (Hibbert, et al., 2007). And, finally, existential guilt, which is experienced as a result of an awareness of a discrepancy between one's well-being, and the well-being of others (Huhmann & Brotherton, 1997; Izard, 1977; Ruth & Faber, 1988). This existential guilt is what Burnett and Lunsford (1994) refer to as social responsibility guilt, where "guilt may result from not living up to one's social obligations" (p. 41). Huhmann and Brotherton (1997) state, "Such a discrepancy occurs when one feels more fortunate than others and experiences an empathetic response to their plight" (p. 37). This existential guilt is what charity ads often appeal to, hoping to place an emphasis on the individuals' responsibility to ease the suffering of victims of poverty, famine, natural disasters, and similar social responsibility themes (Huhmann & Brotherton, 1997). Social responsibility guilt has been identified as one of the major forms of consumer guilt, and can be viewed as an awareness of the difference in well-being between oneself and others (Chang, 2011).

One reason this works is that, when faced with existential guilt, a dissonance arises within the individual. This dissonance is the feeling that results from a violation of one's internal standards (Burnett & Lunsford, 1994). Burnett and Lunsford (1994) state:

Since guilt is defined as a violation of one's norms, values, or internal standards, it is



easy to see the linkage between guilt and dissonance. In this context, it could be argued that when an individual experiences feelings of guilt, he/she is experiencing dissonant cognition. (p. 35)

According to Burnett and Lunsford (1994), when one experiences these feelings of dissonance, or psychological discomforts, the individual will do one of two things: either seek to reduce the negative inconsistencies causing the dissonance; or avoid situations and/or information that would potentially increase the dissonance. When seeking to reduce the unpleasant feelings, Burnett and Lunsford (1994) posit that an individual will actively seek actions, such as:

- Doing good deeds
- Undoing harm to the injured party
- Self-criticism
- Self-punishment

The guilty subject is more prone to engage in compliant behavior to reduce those feeling of inconsistency than non-guilty subjects (Burnett & Lunsford, 1994). It is in this attempt to engage in activities that reduce feelings of inconsistency that non-profit appeals can be made with great effect to individuals experiencing dissonance.

By presenting information throughout marketing materials that makes individuals feel guilty, organizations can manufacture feelings of dissonance within an individual, then subsequently offer a way for them to clear their conscience through charitable giving. This works because one of the basic tenets of dissonance is the need for an individual to maintain cognitive consistency (Chang, 2011). By harnessing guilty feelings, then offering ways to release the feelings, non-profits can gain compliance with their requests, often times in the form of donations or volunteer services (Chang, 2011). People essentially want to give, because it will

make them feel less guilty than those less fortunate than themselves. Bekkers and Wiepking (2011) state, “There is ample evidence from studies on helping behavior that helping others produces positive psychological consequences for the helper, sometimes labeled ‘empathetic joy’ ... in economic models of philanthropy, this category of motives is labeled ‘warm glow’ or ‘joy of giving’” (p. 938).

By creating a sense of this warm glow giving, non-profit organizations allow individuals to feel a sense of control over a particular situation, and the situation of others, which in turn determines whether or not feelings of guilt may be present (Burnett & Lunsford, 1994). Burnett and Lunsford (1994) state:

Whether or not an individual possesses some degree of control over the outcome of a situation determines whether or not feelings of guilt may be present. Guilt feelings are more likely when an individual has some degree of control over the outcome. The more control has over the situation, the higher the expected level of guilt feelings will be over a negative outcome. (p. 36)

Conversely, if the individual has a high degree of control over the outcome and the outcome stability is high, the outcome is attributed to the individual’s ability (Burnett & Lunsford, 1994). The individual has to feel that their ability to make a difference in the outcome could result in a change of the situation presented. If they know they can take action, yet fail to do so, guilt feelings will increase. And this is why guilt appeals, followed by calls to action that allow an individual to affect outcomes, are effective. Chang (2011) states, “The results show that a guilt appeal leads to higher persuasiveness than a non-guilt appeal. This confirms that guilt appeals can be an effective tool for influencing consumer behavior...” (p. 605).

To help get this reaction of guilt, communication efforts should feature high impact, evocative appeals that stimulate strong positive emotions, or graphic and sensational negative emotional messages (Moore and Harris, 1996). Chang and Lee (2010) suggest that the format of a charitable advertisement should be made up of numerous executional components: clear and touching headlines, body copy, vivid case stories, and statistical evidence of a public issue, each of which exists to capture attention, inducing sympathy and motivating giving. Further research shows that these formats should move from general concepts, to very vivid and specific ideas.

### **Identifiable victims/increased feelings of guilt**

Messages containing vivid imagery and stories attract more attention than those that contain pallid and abstract propositions (Chang & Lee, 2010). Often times, in charitable contexts, these vivid presentations often include case stories (Chang & Lee, 2010). Chang and Lee (2010) state, “Such appeals frequently include a story depicting a person in need, presumably designed to personalize the intended beneficiaries, increase empathy and thus enhance the responsiveness of potential donors” (p. 199-200). This is consistent with the creation of feelings of guilt in the perspective audience. The more vivid the story, the easier it is for people to remember and perceive the situation (Chang & Lee, 2010). Small and Verrochi (2009) found that identifiable victims trigger excessive sympathy, because people process those stories with their emotions. Interestingly, the more information provided to people looking through images, the less sympathy they felt to the particular cause (Small & Verrochi, 2009). This is consistent with Taylor and Thompson’s (1982) findings that audiences tend to relate to, and are more influenced by, case stories with anecdotal evidence, as opposed to statistics.

Small and Loewenstein (2003) suggest that identifiable victims stimulate a more powerful emotional response than statistical victims, because they are more vivid than statistical victims. And the more details that are related – e.g., pictures, family information, etc. – the more vivid the image becomes (Small & Loewenstein, 2003). This is consistent with many dual-process models in social psychology suggesting that people become more mentally and emotionally engaged when they process information about specific individuals than when they process information about abstract targets (Chang & Lee, 2010). Small and Loewenstein (2003) suggest that people will ultimately contribute more to causes when a specific family has been selected, as opposed to when they are given a list and told that a family on it will be selected for a donation. This furthers the notion that, in a charitable giving context, the more specific, the more vivid the communication is, the more valuable it is to the organization putting it out there. Vivid and specific examples attach potential donors to causes.

This is because, according to Small and Verrochi (2009), people use emotion more when they are thinking with their hearts, and not scrutinizing information. Small and Verrochi (2009) state, "... an identifiable victim triggers excessive sympathy when people process with their feelings but not when they scrutinize other information before making donation decisions" (p. 786). And this specific information is even more effective the smaller the numbers get (Small & Loewenstein, 2003). Small and Loewenstein (2003) also state:

The fourth case, and the one that has received the greatest empirical support, is the reference group effect. People feel greater concern toward victims as the reference group they are part of grows smaller (Slovic, Fischhoff, and Lichtenstein, 1980). For example, a disease that kills 100 people out of a group of 100 is seen as a calamity, but one that kills 100 people across the country is experienced as much less disturbing. Identifiable victims represent the most highly concentrated distribution of risk (an  $n$  of  $n$ ) because identifiable victims become, in effect, their own reference group. (p. 6)

This research is an indicator that a singular case study is more effective than a representation of an entire population. The more specific and vivid, the better and more effective the message. These specific cases, such as identifiable victims, are thus more likely to receive cognitive attention, and deeper consideration (Small & Loewenstein, 2003). In contrast, abstract cases, including statistical victims, are less emotionally involving, and judgments of them are “more likely to be made on the basis of peripheral or heuristic cues” (Small & Loewenstein, 2003, p. 7). Small and Loewenstein (2003) state, “The victim is more emotionally gripping than a victim regardless of the size of the reference group” (p. 7). And financial contributions are larger when recipients are already determined, as opposed to when they weren’t (Small & Loewenstein, 2003).

Because of this, many youth-serving not-profit organizations use these vivid appeals by highlighting the youth they serve. Burman (1994) states, “Just as significations of childhood are used by advertisers to promote appealing qualities of their products, so also many charity appeals use children” (p. 2). And it these specific, vivid images that elicit feelings of guilt in potential donors. Small and Loewenstein (2003) state, “... idenitifiability of the victim affects altruism” (p. 13). Again, in the case of youth-serving agencies utilizing kids, “The child functions as the quintessential recipient of aid, and the paternal feelings mobilized to care and protect children are thereby extended to the circumstances of other peoples who are deemed needy” (Burman, 1994, p. 2). The vivid image of the child in need evokes guilt, and individuals seek to alleviate that by helping. Research by Eayrs and Ellis (1990) surrounding handicapped children further shows that images eliciting the greatest commitment to give money were those that prompted feelings of guilt, sympathy and pity.

When searching for dollars in a competitive environment, non-profit organizations need to stand out. As the literature shows, creating empathy amongst potential donors is one way they can do this, and this is accomplished by manufacturing a sense of guilt in individuals who connect well with their mission, then giving them the opportunity to relinquish those feelings of guilt through charitable giving. For youth-serving non-profits specifically, this means utilizing their youth in vivid, specific case stories that garner a high degree of sympathy from potential donors. But this practice is fraught with concern. As Burt and Strongman (2005) state, “While there appears to be utility for a charity to use emotion provoking images, this must be balance with a consideration of the ethics of such practices” (p. 579). One of the primary concerns is that this practice involves children, who, in a look at further literature, are shown to require special considerations.

### **Children are different**

When organizations work with kids, particularly when creating policy, they need to recognize that kids are different than adults, and require special considerations. By law, in the vast majority of the world, including the United States, children do not reach adulthood until they turn 18 (Archard, 2010). Children require special attention because they do not have the mental capacity of an adult. This can be seen in many different systems, including in the legal realm, where, because they lack advanced decision-making capabilities, they are treated differently. Elliot (1990) states, “Children who commit crimes are ‘rehabilitated’ rather than punished and the records of juveniles’ misdeeds are sealed” (website). This is the case because they should be free from stigmas of adult crime that could potentially follow them for the rest

of their lives for mistakes they made when they were incapable of thinking through situations as an adult would (Plaisance, personal communication, 2011). Zermatten (2010) states:

Children are different from adults in the physical and psychological development, and their emotional and educational needs. Such differences constitute the basis for the lesser culpability of children in conflict with the law. These and other differences are the reasons for a separate juvenile justice system and require a different treatment for children. The protection of the best interests of the child means, for instance, that traditional objectives of criminal justice, such as repression/retribution, must give way to rehabilitation and restorative justice objectives in dealing with child offenders. (p. 43)

For a youth to be held accountable for their actions they have to show that they are fully aware of potential consequences, by exemplifying genuine agency. A minimum requirement for genuine agency would seem to be the capacity to perform actions that are either morally good or morally bad (Matthews, 2010). But youth cannot fully determine whether their actions are morally good or bad. Child researcher Jean Piaget (1997) states, “We shall therefore call moral realism the tendency which the child has to regard duty and the value attaching to it as self-subsistent and independent of the mind, as imposing itself regardless of the circumstances in which the individual may find himself” (p. 111). Piaget (1997) believes there are three features in the moral reality of the child. First, duty is considered to be heteronomous, meaning that the moral reality involves laws. Second, these laws are followed to the letter, as opposed to in the spirit of their meaning. Third, responsibility is objective. Piaget (1997) states, “For since he takes rule literally and thinks of good only in terms of obedience, the child will at first evaluate acts in accordance with the motive that has prompted them but in terms of their exact conformity with established rules” (p. 111-112). Thus, the moral realism of the child is very different than that of an adult, grounded primarily in obedience to law, such as a parent’s instructions. This law imposes itself on the child regardless of the circumstances (Piaget, 1997).

Youth do not see things as morally good or morally bad in the same way as adults, and as such are not autonomous agents, free to chart their own course. To operate with autonomy, they must be free from outside forces, which, as shown, they are not. Piaget (1997) states, “For moral autonomy appears when the mind regards as necessary an ideal that is independent of all external pressure” (p. 196). This understanding of morality is why they are regarded as different than adults. Adults are capable of breaking through the letter of the law to determine meaning, capable of thinking through their actions, both for themselves and the potential impact their actions have on others. “Autonomy therefore appears only with reciprocity, when mutual respect is strong enough to make the individual feel from within the desire to treat others as he himself would wish to be treated” (Piaget, 1997, p.196). Anyone under the age of 18 is considered a juvenile, unaware of their own morality, and not fully responsible for their actions. Until that day they are treated as minors, understood to require special considerations. “Developmental psychology and anecdotal evidence show us that even the smartest child is not as capable as the most limited adult at understanding long-term consequences. So, we need to protect children from themselves” (Elliot, 1990, website). Certain categories of people are considered to be vulnerable and qualify for special protection (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). Children fall within these categories as they may not understand the concept of voluntary participation, and people must communicate to them the core ideas of informed consent (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002).

It is because of these physical and psychological differences that society has an obligation to protect children. This becomes particularly important when creating policy, because, as Piaget (1997) shows, children will follow the ‘letter of the law’ that has been



prescribed for them by adults. They cannot break through to the deeper meanings, and, because of this, there is a special call to protect children. This call can be considered a fundamental social obligation, and keeping them from harm is a moral, just goal for society (Hindman, 2007). This is consistent with the work of philosopher John Rawls, whose body of work made popular the notion that social inequalities are to be arranged to place the greatest benefit to the least advantaged of people (Rawls, 1999). Plaisance (2009) summarizes Rawls when he states,

Rawls acknowledged that some members of society gain special privilege because of natural factors such as talent and circumstances of birth. These inequalities will never be eliminated, nor does Rawls wish they could be. But Rawls said a just society will seek to compensate for these “natural” inequalities by investing its resources with the aim of benefitting those who find themselves at the bottom of society’s hierarchy... With equal liberty for all as the most fundamental principle, Rawls argued that society’s most important aim is achieving social justice. And that means placing the “highest social value” on the needs of the neediest. (pg. 85-86)

Because youth are in no position to advocate for themselves, to think through their decisions and consider deeper meanings outside the letter of the law, it should be the chief aim of all organizations working with, and for, them to fully consider this in their policy making.

In this vein, world powers have a history of attempting to protect children. For instance, the League of Nations in 1924 and the United Nations General Assembly in 1959 recognized the fundamental right of all children to legal protection, health care, education, and other special protections regardless of race, gender, religion, politics, national or social origin, property, or other status (Kopelman, 1997b). These standard ideals were put in place to assign rights to children, hence promoting their well-being and giving them opportunities they did not have prior to these recognitions (Kopelman, 1997b).

In 1989, world leaders decided children needed more, and that, because of children's need for special protections, a convention should be held dedicated to the creation of a legally binding international document according the full range of human rights to children – including civil, cultural, economic, political, and social rights (Unicef, 2010). The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) was thus born, with the goal of ensuring that the world would recognize that children have human rights (Unicef, 2010). At its completion, the CRC yielded 54 articles and two options protocols. Different from the League of Nations and General Assembly, where children were seen as objects requiring protection, the articles of the CRC ensured that children were seen as the subjects of rights (Zermatten, 2010).

As a whole, these articles and protocols spell out the basic human rights that children everywhere have: “the right to survival; to develop to the fullest; to protection from harmful influences, abuse and exploitations; and to participate fully in family, cultural and social life” (Unicef, 2010). Broken down further, these rights can be summed up into four core principles: non-discrimination, devotion to the best interests of the child, the right to life, and respect for the views of the child (Unicef, 2010). It has the goal of establishing standards in health care; education; and legal, civil and social services (Unicef, 2010). Over 190 countries have formally ratified the CRC, with only the United States and Somalia lagging behind – although they have formally signed the Convention, signalling their intent to ratify. (Archard, 1993).

Of the 54 articles of the CRC, two stand out when thinking about creating policy regarding the use of youth in organizational marketing materials: Article 3 (the best interests of the child), and Article 12 (respect for the views of the child). Zermatten (2010) states, “These two articles are considered as general principles of the Convention, but are, first of all, two

rights: 1) the right to have his/her best interests evaluated, and 2) the right to be heard and to have his/her opinion taken into account” (p. 1).

### **Article 3 – The Best Interests of the Child**

Article 3, Paragraph 1, of the CRC states: “In all actions concerning children, whether undertaken by public or private social welfare institutions, courts of law, administrative authorities or legislative bodies, the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration” (United Nations, 1989). Zermatten (2010) states:

The principle of best interests applies to all actions concerning children and requires active measure to protect their rights and promote their survival, growth, and well-being, as well as measures to support and assist parents and others who have day-to-day responsibility for realizing children’s rights: (a) Best interests of individual children. All decision-making concerning a child’s care, health, education, etc. must take account of the best interests’ principle, including decisions by parents, professionals and others responsible for children...; (b) Bests interests of young children as a group or constituency. All law and policy development, administrative and judicial decision-making and service provision that affect children must take account of the best interests principle. This includes actions directly affecting children (e.g. related to health services, care systems, or schools), as well as actions that indirectly impact young children (e.g. related to the environment, housing, or transport). (p. 43)

The entire best interests principle (BIP) is based upon the recognition that only an adult is in a position to make decisions on behalf of a child, based on the child’s lack of experience and judgment (Zermatten, 2010). When considering how to define ‘best interests,’ Archard (2010) believes there are two ways the principle can be interpreted. The first is that by best interests, the intent is to make decisions based on what the child would choose for him- or herself, which he terms the ‘hypothetical choice’ interpretation (Archard, 2010). The second, or ‘objectivist’ interpretation, bases decisions on what is, as a matter of fact, best for the child, independent of the child’s desires, hypothetical or actual (Archard, 2010). Both interpretations set a standard

for actions undertaken by public and private social welfare institutions, requiring them to apply the best interests principle to all decisions made, taking into consideration how children's rights and interests will be affected by their decisions and actions (Zermatten, 2010). The best interests principal seeks to establish normative ideals that guide moral, social, and legal discussions in regards to children (Kopelman, 1997a).

Kopelman (1997b) posits that the best interests standard must be understood not as an absolute duty, but as a *prima facie* duty, an ideal that should guide choices. Individuals making decisions in the best interest of youth must look at the situation on the face, choosing wisely from the choices available and making the reasonable, most informed and advantageous choice (Kopelman, 1997b). By enacting the best choice possible, professionals can ensure that they are acting in a way that promotes maximally the good of the individual child (Kopelman, 1997b). Kopelman (1997b) states, "This use as a threshold for intervention and judgment also entails the use of moral and socially justifiable ideals and *prima facie* duties about what constitutes adequate parenting, professional responsibilities... the proper role of the state, and so on" (p. 281-282). Professionals must take their *prima facie* duties very seriously, utilizing their judgment to ensure that, at all times, the best interests of youth are at the forefront of decisions made. It is about creating reasonable ideals through a rational thought process and wise decision making. And those ideals help to create reasonable policies and actions that will serve to correct current problems in systems and policies (Kopelman, 1997b). Kopelman (1997b) continues, "...the best-interests standard used as a standard of reasonableness, guides us to select what most informed, rational people of good will would regard as maximizing net benefits and minimizing net harms for children, given the legitimate interests and rights of

others and available options” (p. 288). And these ideals, promoted in Article 3, should be the basis for all programs and policies affecting youth (Zermatten, 2010). Archard (1993) states, “The language of best interests is maximizing. The principle says that agencies and individuals charged with the care of a child’s interests must do the *best* by the child they can. It says more than they must simply do good for the child” (p. 62).

## **Article 12 – Respect for the Views of the Child**

Article 3 must be taken in tandem with Article 12, as the best interest standard is used as an ideal to articulate the *prima facie* duties to the children they affect (Kopelman, 1997b). Article 12, Paragraph 1, states, “States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child” (United Nations). Article 12 highlights the role of the child as an active participant in the promotion, protection, and monitoring of decisions regarding their rights (Zermatten, 2010). Decision makers are called to take into account the viewpoint of the child, giving due weight to the child’s capacity for decisions in accordance to their age and maturity (Zermatten, 2010). But how much weight do policy makers accord to a child?

Freeman (1998) states that there must be a recognition that children are persons, not property; subjects, not objects of social concern or control; participants in social processes, not social problems. Their input must be sought in all matters concerning them; it is their right as human beings. Freeman (2007) states, “Denying certain rights undermines other rights. So, for example, if we deny children the right to be free from corporal chastisement, we so undermine

their status and integrity that other rights fall as well” (p. 7). By ensuring their opinions are voiced, policy makers ensure that children are not just the objects of social concern and intervention, but persons in their own right (Freeman, 1997). Children’s voices are then heard in matters regarding them, and they are no longer passive members whose lives are taken care of; they become active members in their lives (Zermatten, 2010). By allowing them to be active members of their lives, practitioners not only respect childrens’ dignity and integrity as human beings, but allow them to take ownership of their futures, exercising their high level of competence in technical, cognitive, social, and moral matters (Freeman, 2007).

### **Problems with Articles 3 and 12**

While there is a clear call to take into account the best interests of children when organizations use them in their marketing materials, and to account for the youth to have input in decisions having to do with them, there remain issues that make difficult the task of figuring out how to use Articles 3 and 12 in creating policy. Over 20 years after the United Nations promulgated the Convention, many questions still remain unanswered regarding the actual impact and implementation of the standards it contains, particularly across different jurisdictions, legislations and settings (Zermatten, 2010).

Even the very principle of ‘best interests,’ as defined by Article 3, is considered by many to be vague (Archard & Skivenes, 2009; Freeman, 2007; Kopelman, 1997b; Elster, 1989). It is very hard to agree on what is best for any child, and the outcome of choices made can be indeterminate (Archard & Skivenes, 2009). This vagueness makes it hard to actually create policy/legislation. Zermatten (2010) states, “This provision, if we analyze it as a whole, does not

give any particular explanation of its application, does not fix any particular duty, nor does it state precise rules. It poses a principle: ‘The best interest of the child shall be a primary consideration’” (p. 10). It is difficult to come up with any determinate recommendations for policy and action, because it is hard, and some would argue impossible, to know what, in any particular setting or circumstance, is the best thing to do for a child (Archard, 1993). This presents a problem even at times when there are only two choices to choose from (Elster, 1989). Even in matters that are normative, two completely reasonable people may both see the same choices available to a child, understand the potential consequences, and still disagree about what choice is best (Archard & Skivenes, 2009). This presents a unique problem when considering the practical application of the BIP.

Article 3 also seems to pull in a different direction than Article 12 (Archard & Skivenes, 2009). Archard and Skivenes (2009) state:

Promotion of a child’s welfare is essentially paternalist since it asks us to do what we, but not necessarily the child, think is best for the child; whereas, listening to the child’s own views asks us to consider doing what the child, but not necessarily we, think is best for the child. (p. 2)

Article 3 encodes a set of rights and views childhood through the lens of the adult, almost as an external observer on the world of children (Freeman, 1998). But Article 12, if it is to work in conjunction with Article 3, does not seem to offer any indication of how a child’s views are to hold merit. If the commitment is to both hear the child and give the child’s views a weight proportionate to his or her maturity, how are the child’s views to be weighted when creating policy? (Archard & Skivenes, 2009). Additionally, who decides what weight to put on those decisions? And, even when taking into consideration a child’s views, who ultimately makes the

decisions on what is in their best interests, balancing their input with the fact that they are still under the age of 18 and, by law, deemed incapable of making decisions for themselves?

The best interests standard is used as an ideal to promote, in a variety of ways, the children's good, and can help establish an understanding of an organization's duties to them (Kopelman, 1997b). With this understanding, policies and procedures can begin to be formed. The goal of this research is to navigate the difficulties listed above, particularly in the utilization of youth in marketing materials. In agencies where serving children is of utmost importance, where organizations have to balance a variety of different interests, effective policy needs to be in place to protect the various interests and diverse stakeholders. And it was after a review of the above literature, that the following research questions were formulated:

**RQ1:** What are the ethical considerations that should be weighed when discussing the use of youth in marketing?

**RQ2:** When is it in the best interest of a child to be used in marketing?

**RQ3:** What effect does the dynamic of organizational power, and the competing interests within, have on ethical deliberations regarding the use of children in marketing?

**RQ4:** What criteria may be part to outweigh use of children when such use would arguably promote the general welfare?

**RQ5:** Are the child's views directly solicited or is a representative used, and, if the latter, how is an advocate trained and selected?



### **Chapter III – Methodology**

To answer the above research questions, in-depth, semi-structured personal interviews of both program staff (social workers and other human service professionals who worked directly with the youth in both clinical and non-clinical settings) and public relations/marketing practitioners were used. The interviews were semi-structured in that there were general areas the study explored up front – namely the notion of ‘best interests’ pertaining to utilizing youth in marketing materials, and the distinct power relationships organizations face when making decisions that impact youth – while at the same time allowing for content to emerge from the interviews. In-depth interviews fall under the interpretive paradigm, which seeks to provide a deep understanding of the topic at hand, relevant to the individual perspectives sought for a comprehensive study (O’Brien, n.d.). The main point of this research was to understand individual perspectives, not to generalize the sample through scientific enquiry (although generalization could potentially come into play later, with the potential for creation and recommendation of organizational policy). But for the sake of this study, understanding perspectives was the primary motivation.

Interpretivism holds that realities are plural, simultaneous, and local; it also states that realities are socially constructed in human relations and the whole should be examined through those realities (O’Brien, n.d.). In-depth interviews helped decipher the realities of public relations practitioners and program staff who were interviewed, through their own eyes and socially constructed environments, as well as anecdotes about their experiences in their chosen fields. Brunner (2008) states, “Qualitative methods are most useful and powerful when they are used to discover participants’ worlds” (pg. 158). This research benefitted greatly from seeing

the various fields through the practitioners' own voices and experiences, and key insights were gleaned from understandings of individual perspectives.

### **Benefits of In-Depth Interviews**

The researcher sought informants who provided a depth of knowledge with the subject at hand. Lindlof and Taylor (2002) state, "During the course of a study, the researcher may meet people whose knowledge of a cultural scene proves to be valuable for achieving research goals" (p. 176-177). Informants consistently gave information about the key features and processes of their particular fields, including significant customs and rituals, and which people should exercise power (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). This was particularly important, because it is allowed the researcher to interview people who gave a lay of the land, who related their experiences to the settings that will typically be encountered in the field as it pertains to the best interests of youth, the navigation of power relationships that often develop in organizations, and what they viewed as the best interests of the youth who were being served.

The interviews themselves were "conversations with a purpose" (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002, p. 171), and were structured to understand the social actor's experience and perspective (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). Through this understanding, a wealth of detail emerged, one of the key benefits of the in-depth interview (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). When dealing with vague concepts like 'best interests' and 'power,' it was important to gain depth in the answers, and, in this instance, in-depth interviews were unique in that they afforded the researcher the opportunity to gain understanding of these terms, far more than more quantitative measures, such as a survey. Wimmer and Dominick (2011) state, "Furthermore, when compared to more traditional

survey methods, intensive interviewing provides more accurate responses on sensitive issues” (p. 139). Youth, and the need to protect them, is a highly sensitive subject that required a deeper level of understanding, making this approach the best way to define such vague notions as ‘best interests.’ The goal was to first define these terms through the eyes of the practitioners who understand it on a daily basis, and that is what this research sought to delve into in a more narrative, easy-to-understand way. And in doing so, a great amount of depth in those answers was revealed, including backgrounds, opinions, motivations, recollections, experiences, feelings, and recommendations, all of which were gained through the process of in-depth interviews.

The very nature of understanding regarding many of the key terms of this research were deeply subjective in nature, differing depending on professional and individual perspectives, and it was crucial to get at the underlying meanings and understandings to grasp the full scope of the concepts. Lindlof and Taylor (2002) state, “At its best, the qualitative interview is an event in which one person (the interviewer) encourages others to freely articulate their interests and experiences. Its ability to travel deeply and broadly into subjective realities has made the interview a preeminent method in communication and the other social sciences” (p. 170). This is exactly what this research intended, and needed: the navigation of experiences to understand all of the competing values and interests at play.

Another benefit of the in-depth interview was the ability to use semi-structured interviews, tailored to individual informants (Wimmer & Dominick, 2011). The semi-structured nature of these interviews ensured that the informants were talking through the main concepts proposed, through the use of specific, standardized questions. But the researcher also had the

freedom to form additional questions based on the informants' individual answers, a crucial step toward a deeper understanding of the subject matter. This allowed more freedom than a formally structured interview would. Fontana (1998) states:

Mailinowski's example captures the difference between structured and unstructured interviewing. The former aims at capturing precise data of a codable nature in order to explain behavior within preestablished categories, whereas the latter is used in an attempt to understand the complex behavior of members of society without imposing any a priori categorization that may limit the field of inquiry. (p. 56)

By following the semi-structured interview format, the researcher maintained a certain level of flexibility, highly dependent on the person being interviewed, while still utilizing some of the more traditional interviewing methods and techniques. These traditional methods included maintaining a 'friendly' tone while trying to remain as close to possible to the guidelines of the topic of inquiry; breaking the ice with general questions before gradually moving on to more specific ones; asking questions that follow up and check on the veracity of statements made by the informants; and the avoidance of getting involved in a 'real' conversation in which the interviewer answers questions asked by the informant regarding the researcher's personal opinions and beliefs on the subject (Fontana, 1998). The researcher sought to let informants have breathing room to expand on their answers, to give depth to their responses, and for the interview to explore the responses; and to do this while maintaining a focus on the task at hand, while exploring veins outside of the formal research questions that were formulated through the interviews themselves. Lindlof and Taylor (2002) state, "The researcher elicits talk about their experiences and invites ongoing revisions of the ideas and questions guiding the interviews. This reflexive method enables us to understand the sensemaking that animates communicative performances" (p. 172).

Throughout the interview process, it was important to build rapport with the informants, particularly as this research dealt with difficult subject matters like power relationships, and working with, and for, vulnerable youth. In accordance with Lindlof and Taylor (2002), informants were given clear, honest reasons for why they were contacted, an understanding of the project's overall goals, and information on how the interview itself was going to be conducted. Overall, the researcher attempted to make the informants feel comfortable. This comfort enabled the researcher to gain their differing perspectives and experiences, which aided in gaining a deeper understanding than a less-than-comfortable situation would have produced. They understood the researcher as someone who was, alongside them, trying to ensure the responsible use of youth in marketing materials, which helped gain rapport. As Fontana (1998) posits, that close rapport with informants opens doors to informed research. And the researcher found that, as Fontana (1998) stated, it was through the development of a human-to-human relationship, and a desire to understand rather than explain, that deeper relationships were formed.

### **Sample and Participants**

The data collection for this research project was conducted in the spring of 2012. As with most intensive interviewing, the sampling method for this research was a non-random sample (Wimmer & Dominick, 2011), specifically a purposive sample. Wimmer and Dominick (2011) state, "Another nonprobability sample is the purposive sample, which includes respondents, subjects, or elements selected for specific characteristics or qualities..." (p. 94). With that, the purposive sample was used to ensure a broad sample that covered a range of

characteristics in the informants, including diversity in experience level, age, gender, and job responsibility. While diversity in informants is important, some commonalities were sought.

Lindlof and Taylor (2002) state:

People who make the best informants often display one or more of the following characteristics: They have long experience in the cultural scene, perhaps by having 'risen through the ranks,' and thus can serve as reliable sources of the local institutional memory; They have served the scene in many different roles, or currently have more mobility than others, and thus can speak knowledgeably about people's roles and responsibilities and how the social parts work together; They are well respected by their peers, superiors, and/or subordinates, and are plugged into one or more key social networks; They are facile speakers of the local language forms and can debrief the researcher on contextualized uses and meanings. (p. 177)

Commonalities that were sought for this research were that all individuals were working in a youth-serving, non-profit organization; that marketing professionals were responsible for the promotion of overarching program goals related to donations and volunteerism; and that program staff worked directly with the youth in the program.

Initial interviews were gained through a modified snowball sample. Initial contacts were made through the research committee, and further informants were sought throughout the course of the initial interviews, with the diversity of subjects always a goal. Professor Brenda Miles, from the Department of Social Work, had extensive ties to the social work community, and provided a deep pool of candidates to seek interviews from within the social work profession. Public relations practitioners were gained in the same manner, with initial candidates identified and vetted through the chair of the research committee for this project, Professor Patrick Plaisance, as well as other Colorado State University faculty with deep ties to the field of non-profit public relations and marketing.

Along with the diversity of characteristics, geographic location was also a consideration when selecting potential informants. Most informants were picked from the Colorado area, as that is the area the researcher could reasonably respond to for face-to-face interviews. For particularly good interviewees who lived outside of Colorado, phone interviews were used, but the preference was always to stay within Colorado, to help build the rapport that comes with face-to-face communication. Interviews took place across a range of settings, from work locations to coffee shops, another benefit of the interview being an adaptable method.

Ultimately, there were 13 participants between the two disciplines, six program professionals, six from public relations/marketing, and one extra, interviewed. The initial goal was 12, six from each field, but one of the marketing informants was found, at the beginning of the interview, to not wholly fit into the role of a traditional marketer. Of note, that informant still produced valuable information for the purpose of the study, and is included in the data analysis, but the researcher ultimately sought another marketing professional to ensure that six from each discipline were interviewed. Also of importance, only one informant from the program side of the organizations did not have a degree in social work. That informant was interviewed because many individuals working in program roles are not social workers, but fall under the direct supervision of individuals who are, and have direct access to youth in a role that could typically be held by a trained social worker. This provides added value to the overall study, in its ability to expand beyond just social workers, and into those workers who are in program-related roles.

## **Interview Questions**

Lindlof and Taylor (2002) state, “At their best, interview questions can be essential in producing truly wonderful interviews. At their worst, interview questions can confuse people or disabuse them of any notions they may have had of the importance of the study” (p. 194). This study sought to promote the former. The researcher created an initial interview guide, consisting of groupings of topics and questions that can be asked in different ways for different participants (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). As stated, this gave structure to the interview, ensuring that the main topics were covered, but also allowed flexibility to cover answers that popped up unexpectedly during the interview process. “With the interview guide, the researcher enjoys the freedom to ask optional questions or to go down an unexpected conversational path” (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002, p.195). This freedom was important, again, particularly considering the vague notions of ‘best interests’ and ‘power’ that were explored. Additionally, the questions were organized so that the different discourses and themes could be compared and cross-referenced for the data analysis and write-up, as per Lindlof & Taylor (2002).

## **Analysis and Interpretation**

Writing a qualitative paper is different than a quantitative paper. Wimmer and Dominick (2011) state, “In the first place, it is difficult to condense qualitative data into numerical tables and charts. Qualitative data comes in the form of sentences, extended quotes, paragraphs of description, and even pictures and diagrams” (p. 149). The in-depth interviews yielded sentences, quotes, and paragraphs. Data, what is being examined in this process, are the words and phrases transcribed from the interview. The researcher used *codes* to help organize the



different meanings that emerged from the data. Codes are consistent written cues that serve as a linkage between the data and the categories posited by the researcher” (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). These codes are important because they allowed the organization and examination of higher level concepts, all represented in the findings. Coffey and Atkinson (1996) state, “... the term *coding* encompasses a variety of approaches to and ways of organizing qualitative data. As part of the analytical process, however, attaching codes to data and generating concepts have important functions in enabling us rigorously to review what our data are saying” (p. 27).

These codes themselves were broken down in relatively small, general groups of themes. Coffey and Atkinson (1996) state, “The addition of simple, broad analytic categories or codes can thus be used to reduce the data to manageable proportions. Here the analyst is concerned primarily with the identification of a simple conceptual scheme” (p. 28). By doing this, the researcher was able to retrieve data segments categorized under the same codes, from amongst the 13 interviews being aggregated. Chunks, or segments, of textual data that share common codes were easily retrieved; this code-and-retrieve procedure was used to treat the data in a quasi-quantitative way by, for example, counting instances, mapping their incidence, and measuring the relative incidence of different codes (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996).

By counting, mapping, and measuring, links of various sorts were established between different segments and instances of data. Coffey and Atkinson (1996) state:

We bring those fragments of data together to create categories of data that we define as having some common property or element. We define them as being about or relating to some particular topic or theme. The coding thus links all those data fragments to a particular idea or concept. As we will see, such concepts are in turn related to one another. Codes, data categories, and concepts are thus related closely to one another. The important analytic work lies in establishing and thinking about such linkages, not in the mundane process of coding. The importance of the work lies in how we use the codings and concepts, not in whether we use computer software to record

them or rely on manual ways of marking and manipulating the data. (p. 27)

Codes were attached to overarching concepts and meanings as a way of identifying and reordering data, allowing the data to be thought about in new and different ways (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996). The researcher created and developed concepts that emerged from the coding process. These initial concepts were identified and constructed from prior material, including the literature review and research questions, but also emerged from the data itself.

This process moved the researcher toward interpretation, and the codes helped organize the process, giving rise to categories and concepts that allowed the researcher to think through the deeper meanings. The codes were expanded, changed, or deleted altogether as ideas developed through repeated interactions with the data, as per Coffey & Atkinson (1996). Though each interview was not the same, necessary to allow for emergent content, the researcher organized the actual interviews in the same way, as far as general question guidelines, to help organize the coding process up front.

In summary, the researcher moved from the coding of data to the categorization of meaning. The categories of meaning were analyzed and interpreted into larger themes and patterns that gave meaning to the overall body of research. These themes and categories were then interpreted to make theoretical claims regarding the interviews conducted.

## **Chapter IV – Analysis and Discuss**

The researcher believes it is worth noting up front that, above and beyond the themes found throughout the research, a common theme among all of the professionals interviewed, be it marketing or program, was found: a deep care for their organizations and causes. More often than not, these professionals work at their organizations at the sacrifice of monetary gain, and do so enthusiastically and willingly. It was an honor for me to conduct these interviews, and talk to people who are heavily invested in the communities they serve. That being said, throughout this analysis, there may appear to be serious issues regarding organizational thought processes and policy, as well as examples of behavior that could be viewed as dangerous. While the researcher believes it important to the overall study to highlight these, it should be stated that the researcher does not believe, in any instance, this is due to recklessness or a blatant disregard toward youth, so much as excitement to serve their populations, and to do so to the best of each individual's ability. Often times, as the analysis shows, a desire and excitement to do well, to serve the populations of youth they care so much about, causes people to overlook what others may believe to be obvious. This analysis is not written in judgment, or as an indictment of bad behavior, but rather, to highlight areas for potential improvement and growth across youth-serving agencies as a whole. It is the researcher's hope that all practitioners, in both disciplines, will take the opportunity to reflect and examine their own policies and practices as a result.

## Themes

### Vivid Testimonials Make a Difference

If using testimonials did not positively impact the organization, then this research could stop with one conclusion: don't use them. But, consistent with the findings highlighted in the literature review, almost without exception, there is a belief among both marketing and program professionals that testimonials do make an immense impact on donations and volunteerism. Their thoughts on the subject suggest the idea that the more vivid the stories are told, the more people connect with them. This is important to non-profits, because people connecting to the story helps them differentiate themselves from competition, raise funds, solicit for volunteers, and ultimately, matter.

When asked if testimonials make a difference in marketing efforts, Alex, a social worker, stated,

I think they can. I think it has to be a face, too, though. Because you can hear so many stories, and you can hear the sad stories, but I think for people to...and just personally, when people know what I do, they're like, "I can't believe you could do that, it would be so hard, or I can't believe they would listen to you." And then people who ever see our kids are like, "well, that's not what I pictured them like." They all have a lot of that criminal stuff, that they think that's who they are. But once they put a face to them and then hear their story I think people kind of make more of a connection that way.

And that connection is important. There is a common dialogue showing that constituents want to know what they are involved in, on a personal level. One marketing professional, Cathy, says, specifically related to donations, "It's a meaningful connection that a donor can make with a kid. So if someone wants to fund us in some way, they want to know what that does." Many others expressed that using testimonials was the best way for them to market. Becca, another marketing professional, echoed that sentiment when she stated, "Yeah, it's definitely our most

powerful tool that we have. And in thinking back, we all have a handful of stories that we all will use for marketing stuff. So when we're going to give a talk, they're all real, they all really happened, but they're kind of all the ones that we tend to all use." Similar to the difference between qualitative and quantitative research, the stories allow the organization to move past the surface, and begin to drive at actual meaning. Beth, a marketing professional, stated,

Yes, we use a lot of testimonials... because the best way to share the impact of what we do is to share our families' experience. So, on a global level, we'll use the voice of a family, where they're writing a letter, telling their story from a first-hand basis, um, within our marketing materials, so they can kind of bring to life what the program means to them, and it's not just us... you know... here are our key messages, etc.... and, obviously, the, powerful images of, uh, parents with their kids, especially during a hard time... we use everything, because that's the essence of what we're doing, and that resonates with everyone, whether you have kids or you don't... you know, you have a parent, so you understand the power of family, during that time.

The researcher found that, throughout the interviews this sentiment was echoed. The stories are at the core of what they do, and there is no better way to tell that story than through stark visuals and engaging, truthful storytelling.

But is there another way to communicate this information? Could statistics, facts, and figures tell the same story, without actually raising any ethical questions? While statistics showing program impact may seem to be a valid option, the general feeling the researcher interpreted through the data was that numbers do not tell organizational stories in a way that actually engages its public. And, while some people do like seeing the sheer statistics, those numbers do not connect with everyone. One marketer, Olivia, stated, "Everyone wants to see a human face, and see the people that come into [organization]. We have a ton of facts and

figures that are, I feel like they are pretty impressive, but I feel like that human story will always add that extra compelling layer to it.” Another marketer, Gale, said,

Because people connect emotionally to those kinds of stories and those kinds of direct impacts on kids. Now a lot of people also, in terms of our grant funders and in terms of some individual donors, they want to also see broad outcomes. They want to know, “okay well you offered this program and it’s supposed to help kids do better in school, how do you measure that? How many kids showed that gain?” and whatnot. So we have to really work on that as well but for a lot of people that emotional connection is what grabs them and what connects them to the organization. And it’s by connecting to the kids connects them to the organization.

Further backing this notion, Sam, a program employee, stated, “The most compelling part of marketing, for what we do, is stories, of course. More, I think even more so than the numbers and stuff. Stories are what make people, I think, buy in, and you know, really, really believe in what we do.” Overwhelmingly, organizations believed that storytelling, giving that vivid portrayal of the actual impact had on youth, helped connect constituents a better sense of the mission, and more buy-in. Gale summed this up when she stated,

I think it’s part of “show me versus tell me.” We can tell people, “okay, here are all of the things we do, and here’s the number of kids who come every day, and here’s the number of hours that we’re providing...” We can tell them all kinds of facts. But when we show them a kid, we’re showing them...they see, “okay, this isn’t just these things, here is somebody who actually benefits from these programs, from the caring staff, from having this safe place to go after school...here’s a kid who when you support the Boys and Girls Clubs you’re making a difference in a kid’s life.

While numbers can be effective in measuring outcomes, they don’t do that much with those connections.

Additionally, youth highlights aid potential donors and volunteers in gaining organizational values. Gale continued to say, “So by showing them the kids, letting them see

how coming to [organization] makes a difference for those kids, that's speaking to *their* passion, the difference that they're wanting to make." In essence, it validates, for themselves, the impact they hoped to have in the first place, a very powerful motivator. Gale states,

So it's also good to know that about our supporters and our constituents. Who is it that really wants to see what are those actual results? But I guess I feel like for a lot of people, and I don't know that I have the statistics to back this up, but I think they're out there somewhere, but one of the reasons people share their treasures with organizations is because of the emotional benefit it gives them. They feel good making a difference. They feel good...it's an emotional thing for a lot of people. And so seeing the kids' faces, hearing from the kids, hearing those individual stories, that touches that emotional part of them.

They can see the good they are doing, which can cause them to want to continue giving.

Additionally, the deep connections these vivid stories cause allow organizations to differentiate themselves from other, similar organizations, an increasingly important component of marketing in the face of increased funding challenges. One thing the researcher had not considered prior to conducting the research was the notion that the use of real photography can actually serve to legitimize the organization. Beth, who markets a global non-profit organization, stated,

You know, one of the things we say is <organization> is a children's charity; we actually focus on children and strengthening that family... um... but we're not childlike, and so, childlike depictions and hand drawings doesn't represent our charity... we are very sophisticated, um, we're in [number] countries around the world, and we need to act and represent like we are... and that's why that real photography really helps elevate our branding and marketing communications, to be aware, to be reflective of who we are as a charity.

In further detailing why they use real photographs, Beth highlighted an instance where the same image that was used in many of the organization's marketing materials was actually found

at a hotel she marketer was staying at. This is a problem, in that, using a stock image that could just as easily be transferred between either a hotel service, or a youth-serving non-profit, doesn't really do the non-profit justice. She continued,

There's this image of this boy that we used in a lot of our communication a few years back, and I was sitting in a hotel room a few years ago. And it was used to market the hotel's concierge service or whatever... and I am sensitive to it because I saw that photo a lot, but it really showed me that, it could be used by anyone, and it really has no connection to sharing our story. So I'm very, I think it's really elevated our marketing and branding by using these images that can't be seen somewhere else, like in a hotel advertisement or whatever.

The researcher found this interesting, in a field where many organizations tend to rely heavily on stock imagery. It is worth thinking about the fact that anyone can use that same image, which doesn't allow the organization to stand out. To differentiate. But what is the danger in not standing out?

As one social worker, Bill, mentioned, the danger in not standing out is in eventually becoming irrelevant amidst the plethora of organizations ready to step up and compete for funds and volunteers. Bill stated,

But people want to know what they're giving their money for. What is it about these kids? What is it about these families? What is it that differentiates you from the 800 other people that have their hands out? And pulling on the heartstrings is just one of those things that all agencies do because it really does put you in a different frame of mind about what is family? What are these kids going through? What is that cause?

He continues to say that, "And in this community and in the economy of this day and age, if you're not a highly visible program, you don't exist... You can have the greatest service ever.



You can be the best social worker, the best clinician, the best whatever... and if nobody's heard of you, you don't exist. People won't find you."

These responses are interesting in that, in light of the benefits vivid testimonials provide, it would be very easy for organizations to justify, as responsible, the blanket usage of youth in marketing materials without giving it further thought. The data show that constituents certainly connect with them, and the threat of non-profits not securing funding is incredibly real. So it is up to the organization to use the stories to impact the bottom line, to ensure that they can continue serving the youth they were created to serve. Another marketing professional, Amy, talks about this temptation when she stated,

Because I want people to know it's real. I don't want them to say, "so this 16-year-old girl says she was raped when she was 4, she's not sure..." you know, this girl is 4 years old, she's sitting in a hospital bed, every bone in her body is broken, she's in full body wraps here in Larimer County, right here in this gorgeous community where "child abuse doesn't exist..." look at the photo! It's real. There are times when you are tempted to do that. Would that be powerful? Yes. Would that drive donations? Absolutely. If you posted that on Facebook and said "we've got to raise \$10,000 for this girl's medical bills" would people give? Absolutely, yes they would. Can I get them inspired without using her photo? Probably. So it's a challenge of this game in this particular position to inspire those responses and to elicit that passion in people without taking the risks with the kids.

And that response, with recognition of a risk, raised a very important question. What exactly is the risk? Why wouldn't organizations use the best means of communicating their story, thus ensuring stability?

## Potential for Harm

Even though the use of testimonials was understood as the best way to connect with audiences, roughly half of the informants communicated immense risk in their usage. Among the chief concerns for placing youth in marketing materials was an inherent danger in taking anonymity away from their youth. Most youth-serving non-profits work with youth who come from situations that could be considered high risk. Bill stated,

You know, this town is very small, and we deal with a lot of kids who have suffered severe abuse and trauma and we deal with parents who are gang members, parents who are meth dealers, parents who are in lifestyles that are very dangerous, and quite honestly we don't want to give out family information especially, like, with Facebook. We don't want to put a picture, we don't want to give out family information where they could actually be found and that child could be hurt or that family could be hurt. So it's a real serious thing, the discretion type part of it...

By taking a youth's anonymity, even if consent is given, organizations choose to put those personal issues on full display, even in a limited sense, and are opening the youth up to a host of issues.

The first of these issues that consistently came up was subjecting a youth to bullying at school. Kids get picked on for a variety of reasons, but are organizations opening the door to increased bullying by featuring youth who are experiencing difficulties in their personal lives? Krista, a social worker, stated,

At school they get picked on, I would say more for socioeconomic status than anything else. Um, some of the meetings I go to for the school district, it's called diversity council, and they are talking about how to include kids based on race, ethnicity, and sexual preference, but what we see is, our kids get picked on all the time because they don't have money.

Being on the low end of the socioeconomic scale is one of the main factors that put youth in the at-risk category, which most youth-serving non-profits deal with on some level. A youth's peers may not have been aware of their home life prior to marketing materials being published, so by putting that information into a public space, organizations are potentially giving other youth a peek into situations that may be better left private. Gale described a youth who, "was homeless for a year, couch surfing with various friends and having to live in a hotel for a while, not always having enough food; sometimes the only food she and her sister would have during the day was school lunch." This is a situation that, while making a compelling call to action for assistance, would necessitate being handled with care. Joe aptly summed up this issue by stating, "Right. And the biggest I fear for them I think is other kids taking personal information and hurting them. Kids are vicious."

In addition to peers, there are also family concerns. First, does the extended family want the story to be published? Alex, highlighting an instance where a sensitive story was placed in a newspaper article with no family objection, stated,

Yeah. I do think it's their confidentiality. Even with [name] and the whole meth article, I had this whole thing and all of a sudden I was like, "wow, did he realize his mom might read this?" And I thought I don't know that he wants his mom to hear that. And so I went back to him and said "I want you to think about this," and he said, "Oh, I don't care, she doesn't read the newspaper. And she'd be okay with it." And I was like, okay. So maybe family members wouldn't support it because some of what has happened has been a family issue.

The family may not be in the best position to make a good decision on whether or not they want the story to come out, based on uninformed information as to what the story would

contain. These stories typically include information that family members may find embarrassing, or would just rather be left private.

Additionally, Gale brought up family members, who should not have access to the youth being featured, being able to find the youth by coming across a story; a huge risk. She stated,

With that, part of my concern about us making sure that parents have given permission is what if there's a family where one parent is barred from contacting the kids? Or knowing where they are or whatever. That's the thing I think of first where maybe there's a parent who doesn't know where the kids are and then sees this picture and is like, "oh..."... Now I know they're in [location]... So then they go to one of these [organization name] and I'm going to go hang out and watch for my kid.

That potential was expressed by over half of the informants, and should be a paramount concern for organizations featuring youth.

In addition to issues surrounding peers and family, many marketing and social work practitioners brought up the issue of attaching youth to the stigmas associated within their fields. Olivia, who markets a non-profit supporting a highly vulnerable segment of youth stated,

Ok, so, like I said, a lot of times these kids aren't [talking about their situation] in school, so maybe they don't want their school to know, um, or... you know... the kids are not [talking about their situation] to their families, and they don't want their families to know, and we try to, I mean... [talking about their situation] is pretty serious in this community, and we do not [talk about their situation] at [organization name].

This was again corroborated by Cathy, who works with youth associated with youth experiencing mental health issues, and the potential of exposing youth to an overarching stigma attached to those receiving mental health services. Cathy stated,

The fact that a big part of our brochures and things like that for agencies like ours are talking about how hard a kid's life is right now. I think there's a lot of mental health stigma. We work primarily with mental health kids. A primary focus of our agency, really. We work with NYC kids, we work with kids with criminal behaviors or criminal

backgrounds, but primarily kids are referred to us because of mental health diagnoses. I think especially in schools, when a kid goes back to a public school they don't want to be associated with mental health and we got some of that feedback.

In instances like this, organizations have to consider whether or not it is prudent to attach youth to whatever stigmas they may ultimately be labeled with. Cathy continued,

It could be bullying. I mean, our stuff, we have a relatively active Facebook; a lot of our previous clients are active on our Facebook, so if I put something like "this month is mental health awareness month, please help support us..." or any kind of call to action about de-stigmatizing mental health, if that kid is still on there it immediately attaches them to that and there were concerns about having that kid's face attached to mental health.

Throughout the interview process, it struck the researcher as noteworthy just how many of these professionals, program or marketing, recognized the potential for a youth to be stigmatized through the use of marketing materials. But is that necessarily a bad thing? What if, ultimately, that stigmatization allows them to receive services? Could it be justified that, by taking away their anonymity, even in the face of an overarching stigma, that the help that could come justifies potential issues?

Joe made a compelling argument when he stated that it does not matter what help could come, even if it would ultimately serve more youth. The anonymity is not the organization's to give up. He stated,

Right, way more kids [served]. I totally do. And I hear that and I get it but at the same time it's not my anonymity. And even though the kid thinks it's a great idea at the time because they're going to get all the pats on the back, but eventually down the road is it ever going to come up? And I don't know, maybe not.

But, outside of school bullying, where could it come up? Joe believed that it could potentially come up in a variety of settings, including job interviews. He stated, "They really have to know what is the impact, that there could be judgment. Some people might see that pictures and go, 'I remember that name and I remember you're on a job application... I'm not hiring you because I don't want that in my business.'" It is the labeling itself that matters. He continued,

Because that's a label and those labels... I think that labels are difficult. It attaches that level of negativity to it. It's like, here's not just this amazing kid with an amazing story, but it's this added drug program, right? And that's not what...being someone who knows a little bit about where the world of job searching is, because it's becoming more and more competitive because they're looking for quick ways to sort of eliminate people from the huge group. And like "drug kid" you know, some people are just going to say "oh, god, I'm not taking that risk."

And with that risk comes the danger that a stigma may not be appropriately applied. That, through misunderstanding, someone could inaccurately label a youth, spread the information, and adversely affect the youth on those terms, even if their situation is quite common. To appropriately label a youth would take a level of context that most organizations do not have the time or ability to provide. Joe continued,

And the reason why is just because it would take education to communicate. I mean, people struggle to understand what we do here. People come...every show I spend a good chunk of the time talking to somebody who pulls me aside, "so is this for kids that are like in jail?" And I say, "no." And they'll say, "Well so just at-risk kids." And I say, "well...in America 93% of the population is one health problem away in their family from being 'at risk' so I think everybody's kind of at risk. It only takes...lose one parent and we're in the middle of three wars right now. There's going to be a lot more 'at risk.'" It's like the things that they use to quantify at risk is whatever. So I always say these are kids that maybe didn't have access to some of this stuff or more opportunity to ever sit down with a good mentor or somebody who could just kind of walk them through a process. And that was...we just did a Kickstarter thing and that was what our Kickstarter was all about, like each one of these people, a lot of us, have special skills and we don't realize that it's because somebody took the time to just sit down with us and just show

us how to do it. Not the shame-based, like “you’re doing it wrong!” kind of thing. And that happens, but I think the difficulty would be is if you get a kid up in front of a group talking to people about it, it just gets...all it takes is like someone to snap a picture and then be like, “yeah on Facebook, I saw this amazing kid through some drug program tell their story about how art saved them!” and then that’s out there in the world. Because of Facebook and all that...forever. Someone tags it and someone else tags it and all of a sudden you’re tagged and it doesn’t go just anywhere; it’s everywhere.

So, organizations are constantly balancing out the fact that, while testimonials are indeed powerful, there is a risk associated with them.

### **Potential For Positive Outcomes**

It is worth noting that multiple informants also recognized a variety of positive outcomes that could come from featuring youth. Most of the time, this was associated with an increased level of self-confidence, and the creation of something in which the youth could be proud. Olivia stated,

Yeah, actually, a lot of kids find it really rewarding. There's this one kid, [name], and he's always happy to be featured in anything... but, the [publication] did a news story on him, and kind of just... I don't know, it just really gave him, you could see visibly like the boost in confidence, and him knowing who he was. And he immediately signed up to be a [program name], uh, intern, which is kind of a higher position within [program name].

Adding another example, Beth stated,

I would actually give a positive one... so, for instance, I was responsible for overseeing... we have [publication] ads that run, and we profiled two families in an ad... one was a premie who was born at 1 pound and 4 ounces and is now a happy, healthy 20 pound child... and another was a girl who had a brain tumor and she was also paralyzed, and she did surgery, and it was her six family members, so her brothers, sisters, mom and dad who were in the ad... and once we finished the photos, we sent frames, um, copies of the ad, which was really beautiful in terms of a memento for the family... and we

actually turned the entire photo shoot, and the photographers donated it, and they received a CD of all the photos that we took, whether we used them or not.

So, while most informants could talk at length about the potential pitfalls of using youth in materials, there were benefits that should also be considered. When used appropriately, the stories had the potential to not only benefit the organization, but the youth involved.

What was clear throughout all of the interviews was that, while not every youth would not get a job as a result of being in a marketing piece, and while not all of them would get bullied, and not all of them would benefit, organizations are treading into unknown waters when they make the choice to be party to the loss of anonymity. As communicated clearly, there is no way to account for what could happen at any given time; there is an inherent risk. What was surprising to the researcher throughout the interviews was the lack of clearly defined policy, despite the ability of many organizations to talk through these risks.

### **Inconsistent Policies**

When asked their organizations used youth testimonials, often times the initial and immediate answer was either 'no,' or that no names, or identifying characteristics, were ever used. But upon further questioning, only three organizations truly had what could be considered clear policy toward the use of youth in testimonials. Most organizations, though they said they did not use names, or youth in general, did indeed use them in marketing efforts. There were a lot of unclear thoughts regarding policies that were in place, highlighted by two interviews in particular; one with a social worker, Bill, and another with a marketing professional, Amy.



Indicative of the overall set of interviews, Bill seemed to have a good understanding of the policies the organization had, and why they were in place. They did use testimonials, but, as an organization serving highly vulnerable youth, had to be very careful with names and shot selections. Bill stated, “Yes. We do a lot of testimonials,” but was very clear that there were, “No names happening. And because of [identifying characteristic] regulations we’re not allowed to show a full photograph of any kiddo because they’re minors and even with parental consent we’re still not allowed to do that.” Bill continued,

I don’t think so, I think it’s a state code for [organization type]. I think it’s just something special for [organization type]. So you’ll see a lot of kind of blocked shots or half faces or kids that are turned or those sorts of things in our marketing materials. So, yeah that’s a big part. I know that we had some families come in from our program to do some photos and stuff like that but they weren’t necessarily enrolled. They were in my program, but since I’m not [care provider], I’m a rogue; they weren’t necessarily clients. They were just consumers of my program, so there was a little leeway there. But really when you see any [organization type]...it’s against the law I think to show a kiddo. Now other agencies, like [organization]...whole different game. They’re whole game is making sure everybody knows about these kids and taking pictures and getting that in the forefront to pull the heartstrings because they generate [money] every year that goes directly back to those kids, so that’s their whole game. So I think there are different stipulations for different agencies. And then of course with [county protection agency] you can never take a picture of a kiddo that’s going to go through [county protection agency] for [inaudible]. I think that’s a true state statute. So even with [inaudible], I think that the state has to sign off on it before anybody can [inaudible]. So I think different agencies have different levels of how they use families and kids in their own marketing.

While recognizing that different organizations had different policies, the informant was very confident in what their own organization did, and why. But upon further scrutiny, inconsistencies popped up. For example, this interview exchange:

Researcher: So when you put those out there do you use names?

Informant: No.

Researcher: First name?

Informant: Sometimes.

Researcher: How do you make a judgment call on first names?

Informant: If the name is distinct...and we have a lot of kids with some pretty distinct first names now...

Researcher: Like Josh.

Informant: No, that's not distinct. Like Lamangelo...

Researcher: Then you won't use it...I was going the other way with that...

Informant: Arianacola, Pepsicola...kids with very distinctive first names we will never use, even on like our giving trees or anything, so we'll make up names. But if it's just a Josh or Robert or Tony, yeah we might use that first name. And it depends on the nature of the story too, and the amount of abuse, and what that family dynamic is, and if they're afraid that they may be contacted by an abusive parent. We use a lot of discretion when it comes to the safety of how we use that story and the name and those sorts of things.

So, while it was stated that no names were used, they actually do, but only in certain circumstances. But the circumstances where names of youth were used were somewhat arbitrary and could depend on the person deciding if the name was distinct or not. While the examples given were clearly distinct, those judgment calls were not created with any formal criteria, at least stated, and they are contrary to the notion of never giving a name. In this instance, while this professional's passion and exuberance for the protection of youth were clearly evident throughout the interview, there was only informal policy open to interpretation, despite an understanding of potential for harm, and a knowledge of rules that suggested that names should never, in any circumstance, be used.

In an interview with one marketing professional, Amy, the same problem arose. At first, the informant was very clear that the overarching policy, organization-wide, was that they did not use testimonials at all. Amy stated, "When it comes down to testimonial campaigns I don't believe we have any that feature children." Amy continued to detail why, stating, "We don't have a lot of, like, kids' testimonials because it's so sensitive. And a lot of them they're very

young and they're underage, so it's hard to have a 9-year-old tell you in his own words why this is important. We have testimonials from our business members and from our agencies, but those testimonials feature them." There were recognized issues and risks with using testimonials, and alternative options listed, but this informant went on to list multiple instances where testimonials from youth were indeed used. In one example, Amy stated,

We have one little girl who is at [college name] and she will share her story all day long from the rooftops, she does not care. She said, "use my photo!" and I did. And she'll put it on social media and say, "thank you for my [scholarship award], it meant everything to me." And that kind of stuff. So it's not a hard and fast rule, but on the off chance that it hurt someone, even if it gave them fear that they didn't have before, that's counterproductive.

While the girl mentioned is now over the age of 18, it was stated that her story was used multiple times prior to that age, and that she received the award mentioned while she was a minor.

There was also a recognition by Amy that the organization had used multiple youth in past materials, as well, highlighting the same award. The justification for this is that they would be holding the youth back from telling their story, if they did not publish the testimonials. The informant continued,

And the very few pieces where somebody has made it, like the case of the gal I told you about who is going to school in [city] and wanted to shout her story from the rooftops, she's made it her life mission. I would be denying her her life mission to not share her story.

But should an organization enable a youth to make that choice? Or should they hold the story back until there is some other form of assurance that the youth in question is ready? In fact, the

longer this interview went, the more youth it was shown that youth were being highlighted in various campaigns. For example, Amy stated,

He's an adult. At the time he got this award he was not. Which was just last year, he turned 18 in the summer. Telling [name] story, and all of them...I've featured every one of our [award name] winners...there were 12 of them...

In one year, the organization highlighted over ten youth in detailed testimonial campaigns for an awards ceremony. While there were youth in the stories, there were some criteria as to their involvement. Amy stated,

Varying ages, the youngest being 16, though, because these are college scholarships so they have to be at least 16. But I did tell them "we're going to run your story but I will not have anything in that story that will identify who you are. There won't be a photo, there will not be an age, there won't be any current circumstances." I might say he graduated from [school] but I would not say..."And currently works at..." that kind of thing. So they all knew that, they all gave us permission to do that, and that's about as far as we would ever take it with one of our actual kiddos, because it's just too...it's too terrifying for them.

Similar to the first informant mentioned, though, the criteria appeared to be arbitrary. Who identifies what would constitute current circumstances?

These stories are published in various places, as well, giving people access to them across a wide range of mediums. Amy continued, "When this comes out I usually copy this little story part along with any new [stakeholders] out to social media so these get shared pretty regularly. Our Facebook is linked to our Twitter so whatever shows up on Facebook shows up on Twitter" (Varner). When thinking through the choice, again, the risks can sometimes be clear. The informant stated,

Like he's going to be okay? Even then, when it's an older child I try and think of it like this. What am I going to get from using his photo *for him*? What service is he going to receive from us as an organization if I run his photo that he would not get if I didn't run his photo? And usually the answer is the difference in the two choices...it's so miniscule it's just not worth the risk. And it always comes down to that, is what is the risk? And what if he doesn't understand? What if he thinks it's going to be fine and then he gets beat up outside of the school one day because all of the other boys in the class think he's weak?

But, despite the stated blanket policy of not using youth in any marketing materials, they do make decisions to use youth on a case-by-case basis, depending on the situation. Amy stated, "On some level. We recognize the differences case by case, but as far as blanket policy it's pretty much a no go here." But, as shown, youth are highlighted each year.

These two interviews highlight a common theme amongst the majority of organizations: a stated policy that caused confusion and inconsistency. The researcher found most of this to be caused by some amount of arbitrary decision making, with no documented, formal policy. While the researcher chose to highlight these particular inconsistencies, both of the informants were very passionate about not harming youth, in any way. But their passion to help youth caused them to be put in a position where they had to make decisions to either use the testimonials, or not. And, in these cases, the decision to highlight youth, to their perceived betterment, was made despite a recognition of policy that stated they should do otherwise, that left room for interpretation, as well as leeway in making decisions on case-by-case scenarios. And again, almost all organizations had similar stories to tell.

## Only A Few Examples of Definitive Policies

Two organizations stood out in the clarity of their policies. These informants were both social workers, but to note, in the case of both, they were in positions requiring them to also advocate for their organizations throughout the community, with no marketing staff. But it is also worth noting that both organizations did not rely solely on youth development and relationships as their only means of promoting their program. In one case, the youth created a tangible item that could be marketed, so the organization had an item that could show the improvement of the youth, that people would want to see and, in some cases, purchase.

In the following case, testimonials were used, but there were other stakeholders, adults, who could be highlighted, in that they did not have to solely market their youth. Katie, a social worker, stated, in regards to using testimonials,

I do sometimes...in fact that's what we were just talking about. Usually the video for [event] is done a week before the [event]. This year it will be done within the next month and so I will be able to take that piece out and use it in the community. We do testimonials from [families], as well as our board; we've asked them to be proactive in talking about what we do and how we do it so people understand. And usually there's somebody...everyone on our board has a connection at some level. Yeah, we go out and just let them know who we are and what we do and we use some testimonials. Statistics, if you want to know how many people we serve, that kind of thing.

The circumstance is very different in this instance. The testimonials are viewed in the context of the entire family, and the youth are usually far too young to be associated with some of the stigmas youth in various other programs deal with. But even with that, the organization takes great care in how they present the testimonials. This is to both ensure that the family doesn't come under any unnecessary harm, and also to protect the organization. Katie stated,

Yes. You need to run it by us, let us be a part of proofing that before it goes out because it can be very damaging if...you know what we do is very hard and there are so many legal pieces to it, so even though [family] are going through that process they probably retain a small portion of that, so having someone ask them and grill them down to questions that are going to go in the paper and have it go wrong worries me about the information that gets out. Because most people would also bring that back to the agency, say it's [a family] deciding, "you know, it sounds great, I can promote [cause]." Our agency is [agency name], so that gets printed, and then a lot of misinformation that kind of doesn't look good for them or for us. So any kind of newspaper articles, radio shows, TV shows, things like that that have been asked of us then we want to help script you and at least help you get that information out there the right way. With the social media, it just all goes through us. And with our families too, if they're sending...obviously you don't want to say to somebody, you can't send pictures and stuff to your family, you can but you have to be very clear with them, because if they break that protocol – and again we don't have a way of really enforcing it – but it just can damage your case. So those people I think if we tell them stories that can be hurtful to them and hurtful to the [other party involved], you know they are pretty good about it. And we're just creating those policies and they're so new and it's just because social media blew up and we kind of had to do something because we started seeing it.

The organization blocked, to the best of their ability, communications they were unsure about, in this instance, social media, until they know the potential ramifications of it. They are very clear that they control the communications process, because they have to protect the individuals involved.

This organization even passes up great opportunities for marketing, just to be extra cautious in that no harm comes to anyone. That's not just lip service, as the informant described a situation in which a national television program wanted to come in and do a story on [cause]. In the face of competing interests, namely board members and other key stakeholders, the informant decided that the information just couldn't be relayed in a way that made sense; there were too many variables to account for, that could not be controlled. So the

tough decision was made to pass up on the opportunity, despite the fact there was a lot to gain from it. Katie relayed the story as follows,

For instance, I got a call from [name of reporter] from [national news program] one year and they wanted to do a feature story on [organization type] and wanted to follow one of my [clients]. [national news program]. Who doesn't want to do that? You know. It's crazy. I said, "no." And I think everyone had a heart attack that I said no. The reason being is... actually we sat down as a staff and we did talk about it. It's such a vulnerable place to be, and when you're upset and I think processing is good, but processing publicly and actually...until you're truly ready, I didn't feel like putting someone in that vulnerable spot. I think everyone can be star struck for a moment, but in reality that can be so damaging to you later and I just felt like it wasn't in the best interest of my clients and I mean [program name] would bring you good publicity, bad publicity, either way it would be good... We don't leave it as a choice, not through our agency. Because I do think that, again, people in that emotional state, that's what our job is to do, is to actually keep things in check for people and I can imagine that people would be on board because of the name. But again you watch those stories and then you see. When I watch "Intervention" on occasion that's when I look at it. These people are putting their whole lives out there. This is stuff that...and they get so much reviews, and obviously it's a really great way...people thrive on that pain, but it's peoples' pain, and I guess for me if they contacted...they're not going to find that contact through me. That's the other thing is that we wouldn't have offered that to any of our families. There might have been plenty of people on board. I don't feel like that would be a really good emotional thing for any [client] to go through, so we didn't put it out there. I'm sure we'd have takers, but we didn't do it.

Every case was reviewed individually, without fail. The underlying theme of this decision, and that Katie detailed is that the potential for harm makes it hard to justify usage of media. She sums this notion up, by stating, "I don't know. It would be hard for me to feel like I had a role in harming someone in their life, you know that would be hard for me."

### **Use of Consent Forms**

Every informant interviewed stated that the primary means of gaining consent for testimonial usage came in the way of a standardized media release form. These media releases



were uniform, not varying from client to client. They were typically signed as the youth was being enrolled in the program, by the youth's parents, with very little explained to the client as far as what they were signing. Most organizations stated that they have very few clients say no to the media release.

Again, the program enrollment process was often quite detailed, and the signing of media releases, almost without exception, took place in that same process. Highlighting the enrollment process, Cathy stated,

It's pretty big actually. We like to make sure the kid is a right fit for us, because there are similar agencies in the area, we like to make sure that this is the right opportunity. So we have an interview process with the kid and the guardian and that often includes caseworkers and all of that kind of stuff. A lot of times that is who accompanies them. They will tour the facilities, get all of that. We do therapeutic background before to make sure that they know what this program offers and that we know what the kid needs so we can make sure that that is a good match. Then they come in and fill out a myriad of paper work and do an assessment. So it's largely a [issues-based] assessment but it basically gauges their risk factors and projected factors and needs so we know [issues]-wise what a kid is here for.

It is during this extensive process that parents sign a media release form. But, among most organizations, there is very little in the way of communicating potential harm to the client during this process, despite the fact that most organizations can iterate the potential harm that could befall clients. Sam stated,

But I can tell you that, when we go over the paperwork, I tell them, we get to a consent and release form, and one of them is a media release, and I tell them that it's optional, and that they've probably seen something like this from their school, and it's just saying that if they are at an event, or if they're at a [activity], and a picture is taken... ummm... that we would be able to use that on a brochure, or a website, things like that. If they have any questions, I field those, but that's usually how I leave it. And I don't... I haven't heard a formalized process for this, but we don't necessarily go into the potential dangers, or challenges of that.

Consistent with this, the form is often trivialized as something that has been seen before. This train of thought was pervasive throughout the interviews, particularly because the signing of the media release/consent form was typically handled in the very large check-in process described. The researcher often wondered if a family have the capacity, at that point, to make an informed decision on whether or not to be included in media opportunities, and even if given a list of potential harm, would they, at that point, be able to make a well-thought-out decision.

There also seemed to be an odd trust between the program and marketing sides of the house. Marketing typically published the stories in their appropriate mediums, with the program staff trusting that they act responsibly in that role. Likewise, marketing staff trusted that the program staff were acting in good faith while they collected the stories. Surprisingly, when interviewing one social worker and one marketer from the same organization, as the researcher had multiple opportunities to do, there seemed to be misunderstandings as to what exactly was happening on the other side of the process. For instance, one marketer, Gale, stated trust that the program employees were explaining in detail exactly what the consent form meant to clients, including the potential for harm, before having them sign it. The informant believed this was happening because, as an affiliate of a larger organization, there was a perception of long-standing policies in place to follow. Gale stated,

A lot of the policies that we have developed over the years a lot of those we haven't come up with on our own, and that's one of the advantages of being an affiliate of [organization] is that we can connect with other individual [organization] but we can also get that boilerplate policies from the national organization. And that's one of those things where I haven't looked at that real carefully because it was already in place.

But the informant didn't really know if the particular policy was being followed to the letter; instead, there was an assumption that the program staff was doing that. But, consistent with the theme above, the program staff interviewed highlighted a process in which consent was given in the context of the larger enrollment, with no depth given to harm.

In another instance, Krista, a social worker in charge of securing consent for the marketing department, provided an account that was inconsistent with the marketer's belief of what was happening. Krista stated,

It's more parents... so parents have to [program details], so they update it, addresses and phone numbers, contact information... and then, on there, they have to say, yes, my kid can participate in some programs, because some parents don't want their kids learning about [program details], and stuff like that. Um, so they have to say, or they have to say... can we access your child's report card and they have to say yes or no, and... is your child allowed to be used in public relations materials, and they have to say yes or no. So it's up to the parents, and we have a list of all of the kids in our database. I wish we had a report, so that we could just print something off saying, these kids can not be in public relations materials, and these kids can. So we have to look up each kid to see who can be used.

Again, in this particular situation, the marketer believed that the families were being talked to, appraised of potential harm and risk, when indeed they were not, to any substantial level; they were signing consent forms as a part of a larger process.

Additionally, in some cases, where kids did not have permission, but a big event was happening, the staff would advocate to the parents on their behalf to be a part of marketing materials. Krista stated,

Because we deal directly with parents; we want parents involved. We want to know what the kids are doing, um, we, on all of our membership forms, that [organization name] and [location] uses, there is a permission, a checkbox, saying I give my child permission to be used in public relations material... so like, [major sports team] are

coming today. And they sometimes bring, like video cameras, and sometimes the [newspaper] comes, and they always have to check with us first to see which kids are allowed to be used. And then there's sometimes kids who will be like, 'can I please call my parents to be involved in this thing?' And we're like, yes, let's talk to your parents. But a lot of it is, we just want to show what we do here. Because a lot of people don't know what we do here.

This was interesting to the researcher because, in these cases, there was no signed consent form; they had, for some reason prior, received a 'no.' But as the youth pleaded with the program staff to be involved in the activity, program staff called the parents to ask for permissions. Is the parent in the best position to make an informed decision at that point? They have a child pleading with them to be involved in something 'cool.' And what parent would want to deny their kid that? So, over the phone, consent is given, where it once was not. And what was not being highlighted to them on those phone calls, at least not explicitly stated in the interview, was the potential for harm. And, off of that consent, the marketer on the other side used the photographs because of an inaccurate understanding that potential harm was being fully detailed to the clients involved.

Most marketers interviewed worked with program staff in a very similar manner. To them, it makes sense for the program to handle the responsibility of gaining the consent, because, as Becca stated, "I actually don't handle any of that. Their program specialist does so I go through them. They're the ones that have the relationships so it makes more sense for them to contact the parent or the mentor and the little and ask them." Marketers talked often about trusting the program to get signed consent forms, and that they thought they were doing their due diligence to ensure that harm was understood. Beth, another marketer stated,

No, I think they do go through the form, um, like I said, we are very concerned in terms

of making sure, because of our tie to [organization], we don't want to enter into any controversy, where a family says, oh my gosh, you're using my photo in some way that I didn't agree... you know, because we want to do the right thing as a charity and make sure these families are comfortable with it, so that photographer working with the local chapter will go over the release and consent form is about, and typically, um, not typically, but our release and consent form really covers the gamut... so we can use this within any medium, digital, print, t.v., whichever way we want to use it, and we never really get much pushback from families... like I was saying, they are so grateful for what they've received, that they want to give back in any way.

While this organization covers its tracks as far as the mediums covered, the marketer did not expressly know exactly what was covered in the conversations. The informant *thought* the program staff was going through the form, but didn't know for sure. Similarly, Amy stated,

But as of right now [potential for harm is] not on there. And we do talk about that a little bit, but I have to say most of those conversations happen with whoever their consenting adult is. The agencies themselves, they're the ones that meet with these children every day and they're the ones...we don't have counselors on staff, we don't have clinical supervisors and that kind of stuff because we don't offer typical services, so we let the people who are having those conversations with them anyway...

As noted, throughout all of the interviews, there was an inherent trust in the other side to do what the other side thought should be done. But, in almost all cases, did not always line up with reality. Which is perfectly in line with the next theme that the researcher noticed throughout the interviews; a complete lack of communication between marketing and program.

### **Lack of Communication Between Marketing and Program Staff**

Among the majority of the organizations there was a clear lack of communication between the marketing department and the program side of the house. Often times, program staff did not know what the marketing staff were doing, both in overall direction, and with

specific tactics. They typically expressed a desire to know more, but were not kept in the loop. This is summed up succinctly by Bill, who stated, “I’m usually the last to know about anything...”, which was the general feel overall.

Alex described a situation where the marketers were, literally, housed in the basement of her office building, and described an overall lack of knowledge about the work they were doing. Out of sight, out of mind. She stated,

Currently there’s not a lot of communication going back and forth. So we’re having our own weird dynamic happen right now of not a lot of input from what’s actually happening so decisions will be made and it doesn’t make sense because that’s not maybe, in reality, what’s really happening. It’s a rather weird time right now.

And this is happening when there, universally, is an increased call for programs to be involved in social media, particularly in the use of client pictures and testimonials. She continued,

That would be it. So that’s always when I’m like, “who has a release? Who can we use in the pictures?” But honestly I don’t know where the pictures even go. We take pictures and I don’t even know how they’re used.

She repeatedly expressed an interest in marketing efforts, but was rebuffed by those higher up in the organization, despite the fact that marketing efforts are impacting the program more and more as time goes on. Alex continued,

I think it has been consistent but it hasn’t been as impactful. Because what they were doing wasn’t impacting really what we were doing, it was very separate, we just did our jobs, we’re working with kids, but now that their decisions really are impacting our everyday ‘what are we going to do?’ So...no, I think since our new executive director took on it really hasn’t been that way, but it’s just gotten much worse.

That exact sentiment was echoed throughout the majority of interviews, in regards to the relationship between marketing and program departments.

A lack of information was apparent in larger organizations, as well, where program staff had multiple supervisors above them. There was no real understanding if their own supervisors knew what was happening with marketing, just general assumptions. Sam, who was new to the organization, was tasked with securing testimonials for marketing efforts. He stated, regarding marketing goals, "I think they are implied, or implicit... we've never been briefed on the marketing strategy... but yeah, I don't think there's any official briefing." He continued,

It matters to me, and it should matter to program. I can't speak for all program, but I think program folks are busy, and I wouldn't want to say that, oh yes, all program need to spend time on this. But I think it's very important to at least bring program in on the discussion, and I'm assuming that maybe my team leader, or maybe the program manager, or director, was involved in the marketing conversations. I think it could be interesting to get a [title] program perspective, when it comes to marketing, and um, talking about representation, and talking about, and that sort of thing. And from an [organization group] standpoint, um, you know, are we representing not only, um, you know, matches, and folks we serve along race, ethnicity, and gender, but also sexual orientation, or gender identity... and how can we send a clear message that we are welcoming, of GLBTQ families or mentors. So those are things that, maybe, I think there's always room for improvement when it comes to program stuff, and so, yeah, I mean, me personally, I would love to be involved, or hear what's going on and to share my perspective, but you know everyone in the program might not want that, or it might just be me.

This, again, underscores the general belief that program staff would increase the value of marketing discussions, based on their knowledge of the actual programs; as well as a desire to be involved, despite being busy.

At its best, marketing and program staff communicated in very limited circumstances. This was typically when direct input was needed, when, for instance, the program was located at a satellite facility, where communication was a necessity. In one instance, Krista stated,

Occasionally, if there is something that has to do just with us... but if it's a, something that has to do just with Loveland, she'll ask for my input sometimes... [name] asks me to read over what [name] did, to see if it applies to what we're doing. Or [name] says, can you send me a blurb and some photos about something, for a newsletter, or for a grant, or for, um... just for what [name] is doing. But a lot of times, what [name] is doing, we don't have a say in, because it's above us. It's for the whole county and not just for our site.

So, while there is input related to satellite-specific information, there is still a lack of understanding or ability to have a say in marketing discussions that take place at a higher level.

On the marketing side of the house, surprisingly, many marketers showed a lack of understanding of exactly what the program does, who they serve, and how they secure the signing of their forms (as highlighted in the previous theme). One example in particular highlights the overall misunderstanding of the program. When talking about who the organization served, Becca stated that they youth were not really experiencing any traumatic circumstances. At their core, Becca stated, "They're good kids; they just are low income and they need another adult in their life that's maybe going to show them something new or new experiences." And, because of that reasoning, the informant had no problem putting any of their stories out there. But this sentiment was in direct conflict with how the program staff opposite Becca actually talks about the youth served, highlighting multiple instances of extreme risk and hardship youth in their program encounter on a daily basis. In another instance, Sam detailed how he highlighted children whose stories were rough and hard to hear. Children who



have suffered greatly, and need protection. Similar to the first example, the marketer who was interviewed did not recognize these dangers.

With potentially misinformed marketing efforts, are these kids exposed to increased chances of harm, when that may be the last thing they need, solely because of a lack of understanding about their circumstances? Substantive communication between departments could easily clear that up. But there seems to be a wall there, between the two, preventing worthwhile and important dialogue. Sam stated, “Yeah, I think those boundaries are fairly clear, and I think you always run into issues when there's not frequent communication between departments. He continued,

And I've done some fund-development work in the past, but I think when, from a program perspective, you have a lot on your plate, and not a lot of time... there's pressure to perform, and suddenly something comes up that adds to that, and is a function of another team, kind of, whether... almost as if it's unintentional, but I think there are bad feelings that arise as a result of that. I think it's easy to scapegoat or blame a department, an us vs. them thing. It's harder to say, can we blame this on the communication and what can we do to bridge that gap?

On both sides of the house, there seemed a desire to understand each other better. But, unfortunately, many are too busy, or the walls too thick, to actually engage in that practice. And, unfortunately, as was highlighted numerous times, the result of poor communication often leads to another theme: mistakes as a result of potentially dangerous practices.

### **Mistakes Made as a Result of Poor Communication and Unclear Policy**

Over half the organizations reported mistakes being made, as a direct result of a breakdown in the communication process. This, despite the fact that every representative from

every organization stated protection of youth as their primary concern. Not to imply that mistakes would never happen, but the researcher was surprised at these particular mistakes, as a refined communications process could have potentially stopped them from happening. And, due to the nature of the youth being worked with, this is an area where mistakes simply should not be made, as noted by most informants.

In every organization highlighting youth in marketing materials, there was a very distinct 'no' when it came to highlighting any youth involved in a county correctional or protective system. This limitation was clearly understood by everyone, from marketing professionals to program staff. As Bill put it, "If it's the Department of Human Services and you've got an open case it should never happen. Or if it's a kid in the juvenile justice system it should never happen." But, despite that knowledge, this happened in multiple instances.

In one instance, a lack of communication led to a pretty big miscue. Despite the system of having families sign waiver forms, a youth involved in the justice system was highlighted in a marketing campaign. Krista stated,

Um, the only time we really talked about... is when we do have something with a kid in there, and they're not allowed to be in there. Um, we had... we have these annual report brochures, and the one we had last year, we had a kid who was not allowed to be in photos, and he had photo right in there.

At the point this was caught at, there was not much else to do. The materials had already been distributed. She continued,

I went up and went, [name], this kid's not allowed to be in here... and she's like, oh, we already printed that. And it's like, yup, and they're already on all of the tables. Um, luckily, nobody knew who he was, nobody was there... but that was the only issue I

remember. It's like, this is the one kid who isn't allowed in photos, and he was put in the thing.

What does that situation look like if the wrong person had gotten a hold of the photo? This was a very specific non-profit organization, with a geographically precise location that would be very easy to determine exactly where the youth was located. In one instant, as a result of a breakdown in communication between marketing and program, a youth's anonymity was taken away. Surprisingly, there was no follow-up noted, to make sure that this situation did not happen again; furthering the example of a lack of communication between the departments.

In another instance, Amy talked through a mistake that was made when she first started the job, which lead to a depth of understanding about the potential implications. She stated,

Sure. In fact I can give you an example from last year. We were doing a program called the [program name], and it's a sister program to the [campaign name] where we take children who are emancipated from the system, they want to go to college, and we give them scholarships to do that if they are deserving. And we were going through the selection process, and I was very new here, and there was a little boy who just had a powerful story...I mean, what this kid overcame...and I didn't know any better and I thought that people would love that and named him in the story and I didn't put his picture but it had his name and we had a release and everything was very, very above board and very, very legal, and shared that in some of our marketing materials and he was so upset... Because the children that he went to school with didn't know... They didn't know his story, they didn't know that he was born addicted, they didn't know that he was beaten. He had built his whole life to keep that a secret and I blew it for him like that. For me it was a powerful lesson. Because it's about the kids, we have to take their comfort and their level of security first. More important than raising another \$1000 from this event from the six people who might have attended because they saw that ad is the fact that he knows he's in a safe place where his story is contained to people who it can be trusted to. What shouldn't have happened was him going to school the next day and being blind-sided by kids who had seen it or kids who had heard about it... There wasn't a photo but I don't know if there were parts of it that were similar enough, or maybe people knew he was up for a scholarship and connected the dots, I don't know. But he was very hurt by it. So that's something I think about now, you know. I always leave names out. I always leave pictures out. If I'm asking for a need, that's one thing, saying there is a family with three children in need, but no identifying factors, not

even an area of town, you know. And that's why we're so careful about it because when you're talking about child abuse, sexual abuse, physical abuse, this is personal stuff and release or no our goal is to make sure these children feel safe and move forward into their future with confidence and not to be injured by something we've said or done. We're very, very sensitive about that.

Ultimately, it is about keeping the youth safe. Making them feel secure from within the organizations that are supporting them. She concluded,

Yeah, for what he endured, even what he feared he would endure, that's enough. He should not be in fear because of something we've done. So that's why [boss's name] was so, "We don't do that." [Boss] was very clear. And I said, "okay we don't do that, I'm on board." And it really was never revisited. And I do think that there are a lot of nonprofits who don't deal with such sensitive info...it makes perfect sense to use pictures of your clients receiving your services in your ads, but when it comes to abuse it's just such a dark, personal thing.

Those were only small glimpses of what could happen when a youth's life is exposed because of a breakdown in communication between marketing and program staff, or a lack of understanding of policy. Judging from the responses in the interviews conducted, the researcher surmises that this would be the worst-case scenario for any organization serving youth. To put their life on display inadvertently, and without a full understanding of the potential consequences, and to do so as a result of negligence on the organization's part, would undermine the trust that non-profits require to exist.

### **No Clear Social Media Policy**

With only two exceptions, there were no clear social media policies, or even an understanding of what social media would do for the organizations. Many organizations recognize that things like Facebook pages and Twitter accounts were necessary, but did not

know what the most effective usage of them was. Typically, social media accounts were used, “the same way we do print,” said Becca, summarizing the vast majority of organizations. And the same lack of communication from marketing to program was apparent. Alex stated, regarding social media policy discussions, “They might have happened but it wasn’t anything I was involved in. I think I only knew we had a Facebook page when I got tagged by somebody. So I’m sure there were conversations about what we will put and what we won’t but I just wasn’t involved in that.”

This was despite the fact that there was a recognized blurring of privacy lines. When social media came into play, this recognition did not stop most organizations from creating social pages and putting their organizations in those spaces. The researcher did not hear much urgency in creating policy, as well. Gale stated,

Now at the [organization], and this where it’s kind of the social media piece has kind of started without us having a chance to develop a policy around it, and to be perfectly honest part of it’s a generational thing too of...you know, I’m [age] and I get social media and I get Facebook, but there are just so many blurred boundaries and totally nonexistent boundaries that I really struggle with, whereas we’ve got a staff member in [location] who does a ton of stuff, and it is kind of her page and it’s kind of the [office location] page, and she just uses Facebook all the time, and she’ll put out stuff...now I don’t think she does a whole lot about individual kids, it’s more about what’s going on at the [organization], and I think she sees it as an opportunity to get the word out especially to the kids in the [organization], that’s a way they can find out information about what’s happening. So there’s not a whole lot there about individual kids.

There’s no real certainty, as far as what is actually being put out, and no policy in place to ensure that information about individual kids was not being put out, despite a recognition that the existence of social media has blurred boundaries. She continues,

We need to (formulate policy). Yeah, it’s in the works. [Name] is the [title] in [location],

and she has a personal Facebook page. She will not invite kids to friend her on Facebook but if they invite her to be a friend, then she'll accept their friend requests. And she's careful about what she posts on her personal...because she knows that the kids at the club see her Facebook page. But again she's enough in that generation of, 'okay we don't share absolutely everything on Facebook,' whereas the younger generation is like 'put it all on there!'... Yeah. But we've got young staff in their young 20s who Facebook has been such a part of who they are, and that whole privacy thing doesn't...maybe they don't think about or whatever. So I really think we do need a policy about it so that what seems obvious to me or [names], may not be so obvious.

Again, despite the recognition that younger people, even staff members, have very different perceptions of what is acceptable in social media spaces, there was no apparent rush to create policy, and no checks and balances system to ensure that items that could be detrimental to the organization were not posted, even with recognition that social media was used within the organization, by program staff.

In another organization, where the researcher had the chance to interview one marketing professional and one social worker, the marketing professional stated that no kids were used in their social media efforts. This was contrary to the social worker's use of social media. Krista, who controlled a piece of the organization's social media presence, stated,

It's basically the same. Like, those kids aren't allowed in any photos for promotional purposes... um... and then we definitely try. We put a lot more on Facebook now than we did six months ago. We just, we've got this event coming up, we've got this event coming up, we've got these photos... we ask sometimes, on video, silly questions, and then put them on Facebook. Um, same thing, though, ours is really directed at the kids and their parents. We want them to know what's going on at the clubs... and we want kids to come more often. So even though this kid might come once a week, once a month, if they know something fun is coming up that they like, they are more inclined to come that day.

There is a recognition of the overarching policy to not use youth in social media, or promotional photos, and then an allusion to the fact that they try to adhere to that, but do not in all cases.

When they choose to post pictures of youth answering silly questions, and the like, this is not run through the marketing department, or any other checks and balances. It is just posted. Because, similar to most organizations, there is a recognition of the good that social media can cause.

In another instance, where extremely high risk youth are clients, the marketing department maintains a public Facebook wall, and allows youth to post, not anonymously, to it. Olivia, their marketing representative states, in a series of interview answers,

Yeah, our wall is public... the only content that we sometimes post for followers only, um, is usually that kind of newsletter content, so if you follow us you will see everything.

Yeah, the public can go to our website and see everything that we publish on there.

Um, well I mean, I guess the potential is, whenever you tag something on Facebook it kind of goes on their page, um... and, we don't know what their privacy settings are, and that might change in the future, so we don't want to really do that to anyone... we let people tag themselves, but we won't tag anyone else.

The only real policy in place is that they will not tag anyone, instead letting them do it themselves. Though, this does not actually protect the youth who choose to do so, instead allowing them to be associated with an organization that would immediately show the youth as affiliated.

In another organization dealing with high-risk youth, they go so far as coaching the youth in how to post on, yet another, public Facebook wall. Mary, who was not a traditional marketer, but had some duties that could be associated with the marketing of the organization at large, stated,

Every once in a while if I have a kid drop in and want to use our computers and stuff like

that and they have some questions like, 'hey, what does this word mean?' or something I'll sit down with them and be like, 'well, hey, tell me what's going on and what you're writing about,' and they're so open about it. They're like, 'hey, I'm telling my story, and I want to be able to tell it right. This is what happened to me. How do I put this on the paper?' So, we'll go through basic writing stuff, 'cause they're still kids, they're still learning how to write a decent paper in the first place. So we'll sit down and outline some things maybe and be like, 'you're a little scattered, let's get you focused on what you really want to say.'

The youth were being coached in how to tell their stories, and then how to post them to the organization's Facebook site at large, with no real recognition of who may see the stories. In this instance in particular, the youth's anonymity would be stripped the second someone saw where they posted. Mary continued with this rationale,

Teenagers in general get kind of the short end of the stick. We don't really listen to them as a general society because we think, 'oh, they're just kids, they don't really have opinions yet, they can't drive a car, what gives them the right to have any opinion on anything else,' and they know that and they recognize that nobody really listens to them and it makes them angry and it makes them want to present their story more and more. So by giving them an outlet and really letting them communicate with their friends about who also has the same kinds of issues, but then also lets them know that it's okay to write this down, it's okay to tell everyone on Facebook what happened to you today at school, and it's definitely okay to go to the school board and say, 'hey, this isn't okay,' and really just empowering them to get their story out there...it's good for them.

This member of the organization is making the decision to enable a youth to take their anonymity away, without concern for the potential long-term consequences that the action may bring. It is a new, and exciting, medium, which means that the youth now have the opportunity to tell their tale.

But what happens if they are not ready for consequences? In response to follow-up questions to that point, Mary stated, "You know, we can't be responsible for what happens outside unfortunately, but if they ever have problems we have a counseling element that we



provide here as well.” And if, as a result of a posting, something bad did happen? Mary continued,

Oh man, that would be absolutely tragic. Thank goodness we don’t have that problem. Really at that point the only thing that we can really do is offer support for the parents and family and invite them to seek out counseling through us and then, you know it’s hard because in the news they’re going to say this person is a [inaudible] or this person has [inaudible] and the best thing we can say is that this person was so brave that it really takes a brave, brave person to tell your story in the first place and then to go out in the community to [identifying information] is a big deal.

These thoughts put words to the overall trend the researcher saw throughout most organizations. No real clear commitment to ensuring that protective measures were in place to, without a doubt, make sure no youth were harmed as a result of social media efforts. There was excitement to what it could bring, and enough recognition of potential consequences that not safeguarding against potential harm could be considered reckless.

### **Answers to the Research Questions**

**RQ1:** What are the ethical considerations that should be weighed when discussing the use of youth in marketing?

There were two very clear issues that needed to be weighed: the potential for harm, particularly the loss of anonymity in clients, and the potential for good. Almost unanimously, both marketing and program professionals were able to identify the loss of anonymity as a very real concern. When organizations choose to showcase their own youth/clients in their organizational materials, they are associating them to whatever stigmas their services provide, be it mental health, adoption, mentoring, or otherwise. Are these youth ready to accept that

stigma? Have they fully worked out whatever issues they have, individually, that will come to light when they are on display? Have their families received enough counseling as to the potential drawbacks to their youth being highlighted, and can they make an informed decision of consent? Are they only doing the highlight because they feel indebted to the organization for providing services? Are decision-makers within the organization meeting to talk through each youth on a case-by-case scenario to make the best determination? These are just a few of the questions that come up when thinking through some of the potential for harm.

On the flip side, how can an organization not highlight youth when there is a clear benefit that brings in more volunteers, and more money? Consistent with the literature review, the data repeatedly shows that practitioners on both sides of the house realize the overall good that highlighting youth could cause. Increases in revenue and volunteerism, increased stakeholder engagement, and differentiation from similar organizations in a crowded non-profit marketplace are just a few of the benefits. These factors allow organizations to stand out, and to ultimately serve both the individual youth better, and more youth overall. That is an important consideration for organizations to think through. Additionally, there were also instances where the youth themselves benefit from being highlighted, through increased self-esteem, though only a few practitioners listed this as a benefit. Ultimately it comes down to balancing that potential for harm, with the positive outcomes of being served.

**RQ2:** When is it in the best interest of a child to be used in marketing?

After reviewing the data, the researcher does not believe it can be stated with full confidence that it is ever in the best interest *of the child* to be used in marketing materials. The

potential for harm was a constant theme amongst both marketing and program professionals.

If a child is put in the public spotlight, their anonymity is taken away. There is no getting around that. Organizations cannot accurately predict what will happen when that anonymity is taken away. Protecting youth, which all informants stated was the primary concern of their organization, means shielding them from harm that would come as a result of the actions of the organization. Because of that, it cannot be said that it is in the child's best interest to be highlighted, despite allusions to some benefits, e.g. self-esteem.

**RQ3:** What effect does the dynamic of organizational power, and the competing interests within, have on ethical deliberations regarding the use of children in marketing?

The data shows a clear lack of communication between the marketing and program departments; a strong belief that walls exist between the two. This lent itself to an us-versus-them mentality that was shown to have an impact on the creation of policy, feelings of competing interests between marketing and program, and an overall sense of being uninformed as to what each side was doing. It should be noted that the only organization conducting significant ethical deliberations did so amongst trained program staff, and did not have marketing professionals under employ. So, even in this instance, it cannot be said with any confidence that the same walls would not have existed with the standard division between the two departments.

As a result of these invisible lines, mistakes were made that put youth in harm's way. This was a direct result of a lack of communication, as all of the issues could have been averted with a better, more fluid, communication process. Professionals on both sides talked about

wanting to know more about the other, but for myriad reasons, did not follow through on those desires. While every informant interviewed talked of the harm that could come from featuring a youth in a way that exposed them to harm, very few had any clear answers that would help bring marketing and program together. Each side essentially operated as their own entity, trusting that the other side was taking actions appropriate with their tasks.

**RQ4:** What criteria may be part to outweigh use of children when such use would arguably promote the general welfare?

Despite the general understanding that the use of testimonials would boost both volunteerism, as well as donations, a few organizations refused to use youth in their marketing materials because of the potential for harm. Knowing that harm could come to their youth, these organizations determined that the potential for increases in volunteers/donations were not worth risking harm of one of their youth. This potential for harm, primarily the loss of anonymity, is the primary criteria used to outweigh the use of children, even when the greater good that could come of it was recognized.

**RQ5:** Are the child's views directly solicited or is a representative used, and, if the latter, how is an advocate trained and selected?

Parental consent, in the way of consent forms, was the sole means of determining whether the organization had approval to highlight the youth. The youth themselves were queried solely to determine if they were even interested in being highlighted, but they alone did not determine their fate. In every instance, a youth who did not want to be highlighted was

not highlighted. For those who did, parental consent was always a requirement. Though, in multiple instances, coercion could be considered a factor. There were multiple instances where special opportunities came up, with youth pleading with program representatives to call their parents to receive consent over the phone. In these instances, it could be argued that representatives from the organization, by calling the parents on behalf of the child, are putting parents/guardians in an awkward position, without the ability to fully think through the potential ramifications of their choice. The organization, providing services the parent often times requires, put themselves in a position that could cause the parent to feel obligated.

Additionally, program staff, who were the primary advocates for the youth in this regard, were almost always trained social workers. But, in some instances, there were program professionals in positions to advocate on behalf of the child who were not. Some were interns, some had degrees in non-human service fields, and some were volunteers. In these instances, the advocates, as represented in the interviews, had as much training on policy in this regard as many of the informants; which is to say, not much. This is consistent with the overall lack of organizational communication between marketing and program, as well as the clear lack of informed, consistent policy overall.

## Conclusion

This study sought to examine the thought processes behind usage of youth in marketing materials amongst a diverse array of non-profit organizations. The discourse of the informants has affirmed the words of Renee Rivera, with only a few exceptions. In her time as the Executive Director of the Colorado chapter of the National Association of Social Workers, she found that most non-profits were 'winging it'; that they did not truly have consistent, informed policy when utilizing their own youth in their marketing materials. After analyzing the data, the researcher believes her to be correct. While there is a common understanding, be it program or marketing professional, that vivid testimonials make a difference, in the form of deeper connections with potential and current stakeholders, and that they should be used, there is also an almost universal understanding that the use of them opens the youth up to harm.

In that understanding of harm, the researcher believes one of the most important findings this study can provide organizations is that it is *never* in the best interest of the youth to be highlighted in marketing materials. Organizations cannot account for every situation that could befall a youth as a result of the loss of anonymity that marketing materials, intrinsically, will cause. This is not something to be taken lightly. Going back to the literature, there is a clear call to protect youth, as they *require* that protection. That can be seen in both the work of Piaget and Rawls. Piaget (1997) established that youth follow the letter of the law; they cannot break through the deeper meanings of actions, and will follow what has been prescribed for them by adults. Rawls (1999) established that a just society is one in which the needs of the least advantaged people are taken into account, first and foremost. Youth, by the mere nature

of being youth, are in this category, and organizations must do everything in their power to protect them.

By understanding that it is never in their best interest, that they are going to be exposed to harm the second their face, or their story, lives within marketing materials, it is the researcher's hope that organizations will begin to take their usage of youth more seriously; that the knowledge of that alone would cause them to pause, reflect, and seek counsel. And, additionally, that they would do this on a case-by-case scenario, taking seriously the safety of *each* individual youth. The researcher believes that there is room to use youth in marketing materials, as the organizational benefits are clear, and the greater good is served by connecting key stakeholders to the important work non-profits do, thus serving more youth. But a blanket form, signed in a long enrollment process, that seeks to cover all of the youth involved is not nearly good enough. What is required is serious deliberation amongst qualified professionals, from both the marketing and program side of the house, going through each opportunity presented with a fine-toothed comb, as well as every single youth involved, to ensure that the opportunity is wise for all parties. If that sounds inconvenient, then let us consider that good. Protecting people often is. And if an organization is not equipped for that level of deliberation, then perhaps they should not enter into this arena at all, instead waiting for a time when they are better able to handle the responsibilities that come with the usage of youth.

Again, in agreement with Rawls, a just society is one that takes into account the least among us; to the researcher, that means every single one, down to the individual. It accounts for the fact that every youth is different, with their own challenges. And each requires a level of understanding and counsel that fits the harm that could befall them. It may be that harm will

never come and that, though the potential for harm is recognized, an organization could use the policies in place for 100 years and never see it. But that is not the point. The point is being dutiful and responsible with the trust the youth and their families are placing upon professionals in this field. And with that, to safeguard against the mere *potential* for harm.

Though professionals in this study could easily identify that potential, the researcher was surprised to find that most organizations did not safeguard against it. This showed through particularly with most professionals' own inconsistencies in understanding their organizational policies; with the use of forms that did not truly give the families involved a chance to think through the decision they were making when signing consent; with a concerning lack of communication between marketing and program departments, to the degree in which marketing professionals at times did not understand the demographics they were serving, and where social workers often did not have any indication of what types of marketing materials were going out; and with a clear rush to use social media without any policies in place, and without a true understanding of both its potential to help organizations grow, and also to cause harm to the youth they serve.

While the intentions of all of the professionals were good, and a true care and desire to do the best for the youth they were serving was apparent, these holes need to be filled. When doing the analysis, the researcher was constantly reminded of one of the interviews. During the interview, Joe, whose organization had chosen not to highlight youth at all, stated,

But it's watching the door. If someone comes in that door...I tell the kids this is my house, the rules of my house are...in my grandfather's house you can't wear your hat, and I don't wear my hat at my grandfather's house because I respect his home. At my home there are a few rules. This is my home and this is my place and there are some rules that are just not up for debate. And that goes for you but it also goes for any scary weirdo that walks up in that hallway and



wants information, the first person you've got to deal with is me and I will capably guard that door. And a lot of them it's their first encounter with someone like that.

Joe had a passionate belief that protecting youth was his *responsibility*. This responsibility translated to both his physical building, as well as his media policies. He viewed himself as the first and last line of defense, and if anything questionable came along, he served the role of capable protector. The researcher believes that this exact thought process should permeate throughout all non-profit organizations.

### **Limitations of the Study**

The use of qualitative, in-depth interviews presents several limitations to this study that deserve discussion. First and foremost, these interviews are not representative of public relations/marketing and program practitioners across all youth-serving non-profit organizations. This research can only be used in understanding this issue through the context of these individual informants, and the organizations they work for. Similarly, while a snowball sample helped secure interviews, the sample resulted in multiple employees who worked for the same organization. While this added additional value to the study, in the form of understanding the relationships between marketing and program professionals within organizations, these individuals often times knew their peers were being interviewed, which could potentially cause them to be more guarded with their answers.

Another limitation of the study was the researcher himself. His background in non-profit marketing was highlighted at the beginning of each interview, in an attempt to build rapport. This background may have caused informants to want to answer 'correctly,' or to be careful

with their answers to avoid being judged. Though it should also be noted that the researcher's background also allowed for a knowledge of the subject that aided in the interview process. Having highlighted youth in various marketing materials throughout his own professional experience, the researcher was familiar with many of the techniques used. This allowed the researcher to move past detailed descriptions used to aid in clarification of mediums and methods, allowing more time to invest in the issues involved in their usage.

One further limitation could be found in the data analysis itself. If given the same transcripts, another researcher may have interpreted them differently. The themes may have been different, as well as the meaning gained from the answers. These limitations may affect the generalizability and ability to replicate the data, but the information gained from analyzing the unique perspectives of marketing and social work professionals working within youth-serving non-profit organizations could result in a better understanding of the issues that come up when highlighting youth in marketing materials. This understanding could be used in further research.

Lastly, the researcher initially hoped to help create actual policy regarding this issue, but ultimately felt limited in this regard. Given the differences between the various non-profits, who served youth across a wide array of demographics, from mental health to mentoring, the researcher found it difficult to suggest definitive policy for each specific group, and views that as a monumental challenge worthy of its own study. Instead, the researcher chose to look at the overall landscape of the issue, hoping that organizations could begin framing their own discussions on this issue, based on well-informed data. In the future, the researcher believes it would be possible to address more specific policy, but that would require in-depth research on

actual policies adhered to across a variety of fields, from sociology to biomedicine, to help formulate an all-encompassing policy. The value in this study, instead, is for organizations to take an honest accounting of where they are at, and how they can create informed policy that ensures they are protecting their own youth, whatever demographic they are a part of, from harm to the best of their ability.

### **For Future Research**

While the results of this study help lay the foundation for youth-serving non-profit organizations in creating internal policies and structure that ensures they protect their youth from harm, it has also raised a lot of questions for future topics of research. As noted in the limitations section, it is recommended that further research be done with the goal of creating actual policy that organizations can use as their own. Each professional interviewed expressed a desire to have uniformed policy that would help them navigate this issue in the future; there is a lot of opportunity to help them through the creation of such policy. Additionally, social media was a topic of concern amongst most practitioners. Further studies into the usage of social media for youth-serving non-profit organizations is recommended, to help them clarify some of the issues that arise when they are navigating a constantly changing environment. There was definitely a strong sense of trepidation for the new mediums, but a level of recognition that they needed to be in those spaces to keep up, and further research into how and why non-profits use social media would help clarify the issue. In that vein, many of the social workers interviewed expressed concern for their employees' usage of social media. Is it appropriate for staff to 'friend' youth/clients on Facebook? What about the parents of those youth? Should a

social worker look up a client on their client's personal social media networks to get information on their activities? These are only a few of the issues that were raised throughout the interviews, and the researcher believes there is a lot of work to be done in this regard, with the goal of aiding professionals in social work and program-related roles in creating best practices to adhere to when thinking through these decisions. The researcher also believes this study should be conducted on a much larger scale. Now that many of the terms have been laid out – e.g. the loss of anonymity, use of consent forms, etc. – there should be an understanding of how these terms fit into the larger scale of youth-serving non-profits across the nation.

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## **Appendix 1**

### **Informed Consent**

#### **Consent to Participate in a Research Study Colorado State University**

Youth-serving non-profit organizations' use of youth in organizational marketing materials

**PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR:**

Patrick Plaisance, Associate Professor, Colorado State University, Fort Collins, CO 80523-1785.  
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**CO-PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR:**

Zachary McFarlane, Colorado State University, Campus Mail 1040, Fort Collins, CO 80523-1785.  
Tel. 1-970-218-8533. E-mail: Zachary.mcfarlane@colostate.edu.

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The reason you are invited to take part in this research is that you are either a social work professional, or public relations practitioner who works with a youth-serving non-profit organization. The supervising faculty member for this research is Patrick Plaisance (principal investigator), Associate Professor in the Department of Journalism and Technical Communication at Colorado State University. The researcher, Zachary McFarlane (co-principal investigator), is a graduate student in the same department.

The purpose of this research study, which is for a thesis study, is to understand the potential ethical implications involved when organizations decide whether or not to feature youth/clients in their organizational marketing materials, and also how organizations deliberate the issue. The interview will take around one hour and a half.

Your conversation will be tape-recorded to help the researcher recall your comments and to analyze the data correctly. All material gathered in the course of this research will be held in strict confidentiality, with no names attached to data unless express permission is given. The content of the conversation will be used only for this research study and will not be shared with others, except in summary form in the final thesis and in any publications that may result from it.

The risks associated with your participation in this study are minimal – no greater than you would encounter in talking about your work with any other person. Although it is not possible to identify all potential risks, the researchers have taken reasonable safeguards to minimize any known and potential, but unknown, risks.

Page 1 of 2, Subject Initials \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

There are no specific benefits for participating; however, we hope you will benefit by being able to reflect on and share your experience and insights about the utilization of youth in marketing materials. It is hoped that youth-serving non-profit organizations as a whole will benefit by gaining a clearer understanding of ethical considerations regarding such practice. There is no cost to you for participating.

Your participation in this research study is voluntary. If you decided not to participate in the study, you may withdraw your consent and conclude the interview with the researcher at any time.

Participants in this study will not be identified in connection with the data. However, later, in the process of data analysis, individual participants may be asked for permission to partially or fully identify them in cases where events or work experiences are found to be particularly representative or compelling. In all cases, participants have the final decision on whether any identification is made.

Before you decide whether to accept this invitation to take part in the study, please ask any questions that might come to mind now. Later, if you have questions, you may contact Zachary McFarlane at [Zachary.mcfarlane@colostate.edu](mailto:Zachary.mcfarlane@colostate.edu). If you have any questions about your rights as a volunteer in this research, contact Janell Barker, Human Research Administrator, at 1-970-491-1655.

This consent form has been approved by the CSU IRB for the protection of human subjects on February 14, 2012.

Your signature below acknowledges that you have read the information provided and willingly sign this consent form. Your signature also acknowledges that you have received, on the date signed, a copy of this document containing two pages.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed name of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Co-Principal Investigator

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

Page 2 of 2, Subject Initials \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

## **Appendix 2**

### **Interview Protocol**

Hello <name of potential interviewee>, my name is Zachary McFarlane, with the Department of Journalism and Technical Communication at Colorado State University <If referred, mention name of person who referred>. Do you have a minute to talk?

I'm completing my master's thesis, and am currently conducting research in the form of personal interviews with professionals working in youth-serving, non-profit organizations regarding the use of youth/clients in marketing materials. Just trying to understand how organizations utilize their youth in testimonials, case studies, and recruitment pieces of that nature by talking to the professionals, like you, who are involved in the process. We would talk about a variety of topics, ranging from organizational goals, to benefits/drawbacks to using youth in materials, to how you approach youth and their families to ask for their participation.

The overarching goal of this would be to examine how organizations can put effective policies in place regarding the use of youth in marketing materials, and your insight would be invaluable to that end.

The interview will be informal, and would take no more than 90 minutes to complete. Would that be something you would be interested in talking with me about?

### **Interview Questions**

May I have your permission to tape record this session? I want to make sure I get everything right.

Tell me a little about your work history, and how you ended up working here.

Can you describe the culture and work environment here? What kind of place is it to work in?

If you had to, what would you say are the most important values to this organization?

How do those values reflect throughout the organization?

Specific to marketing, what are the overarching goals for the organization's marketing efforts?

How much independence do you have to create and distribute marketing materials?

Are marketing decisions made by you independently, or do you collaborate with others in the office? If so, who do you typically confer with?

Do you use testimonials/case studies in your marketing efforts?

Do you talk about featuring youth, or clients, when you're devising marketing plans? In those discussions, is there anything in particular that you typically talk about/grapple with?

Have you seen any benefits/drawbacks to using youth in marketing materials?

How do you typically approach youth and their families to see if they want to be involved in marketing efforts? What has been your experience in this capacity, as far as their reactions?

Generally speaking, what do you typically tell them their participation will entail?

Thank you for your participation. I appreciate you sharing your experiences, and if you'd like, I would be happy to send you a digital copy of the research once it's completed.

### **Appendix 3**

#### **About the Researcher**

I am a graduate student at Colorado State University pursuing a M.S. in Public Communication and Technology. I have also worked as a marketing practitioner in various non-profit organizations over the course of six years, prior to attending graduate school full-time. After eight years of service in the United States Coast Guard, I decided to exit the military to pursue my education on a full-time basis. I eventually received my bachelor's degree in journalism from the University of Northern Colorado. After receiving my undergraduate degree, I began working for a local, Fort Collins-based non-profit organization dedicated to serving youth through matching adult mentors to at-risk youth. In that role, I was responsible for creating and disseminating messaging for the entire organization. This included the use of both traditional marketing techniques, as well as new media, from internet to social. It was during this time that I became interested in finding out more about the ethical implications of using youth in marketing materials, as that was a practice we often employed. While I was a proponent of doing more features of youth, I understood that there existed a fine line between exploitation, and what would be considered acceptable usage. After making the decision to attend graduate school full-time, this was my primary area of emphasis, almost exclusively throughout my graduate degree program, culminating in this study.