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Christian Help: For Those Who Need It Most

Christian Help Inc was founded in 1975 in Morgantown, West Virginia**.** It started in a smaller store but quickly out grew the space so the non-profit organization purchased a five-story building in downtown Morgantown for one dollar**.** The building needed a lot of work, but was able to be upgraded with the help of many volunteers**.** To this day most of the work at Christian Help is done by volunteers but there are some full time employees**.** Cheryl Stout is the Executive Director and most other employees come from the Peace Corps**.** Employees from the Peace Corps are paid a small hourly wage but after completing a certain number of hours, receive five thousand dollars toward college tuition**.**

Christian Help has five different services: A free clothing store, emergency financial assistance, furniture exchange, a food pantry, and career closets**.** All of these services are free to the public**.** Beyond these five services there are also two annual events**.** In August the free clothing store is transformed for back to school kid’s day**.** On this day children are able to come and get school supplies including backpacks, notebooks, pens, pencils, glue sticks, etc**.** They are also able to get back to school clothes**.** Hundreds of children are helped by this event each year**.** In December, Christian Help hosts a toy give away which has helped close to a thousand families each year**.** Christian Help’s mission statement: “To respond to situations of emergency and need with immediacy and simplicity, respecting the dignity of all persons in the spirit of Jesus Christ”**.** The goal is to not make people jump through hoops when they’re in need of some assistance**.**

Christian Help relies on donations of goods such as clothing, household items, food, financial donations, and/or giving contributions of time through volunteer service**.** When we all work together it makes our community a better place to live**.** Donations of any kind are important for meeting the needs of families and children who need help**.**

Our persuasive goal with this project is to educate and inform people about Christian Help and what it is all about**.** We also want to help the organization in any way we can by getting as many people as we can to donate appropriate items**.** From this message, we want people to donate food, clothes, money, school supplies and even just some of their time**.** Our target audience is our family, friends and local businesses**.** We asked our friends and family because it was more personal and we were very successful with them**.** Tyler and Stephen were able to donate six full bags of clothes**.** Tyler also showed the Christian Help video to his coworkers and received donations from them**.** Stephen even went a step further and persuaded a few of his friends to spend a few hours volunteering**.** Shannon went around and collected clothing from her friends all over Morgantown totaling four bags**.** Tanisha donated two full bags of her own clothing**.** She also went to Mileground Dry Cleaners and was able to collect another two bags of clothing that people never came to pick up**.** Everyone who we asked to help was very forthcoming and eager to help**.** We feel that if we had asked random people that we would not get a very high response rate**.** We still made flyers to get the word out about Christian Help, however we did not expect to get a significant amount of donations through the flyers**.** It is even possible that someone who needed clothing or school supplies saw the flyer and decided to take advantage of Christian Help's services**.** When it comes to psychological factors, such as intelligence, we knew who we were asking for donations of so we knew before hand that these people were competent and had a few things to spare**.** We want to design our persuasive message for people to have higher impression relevant involvement**.** For example, Stephen's friend Kate is applying to med school and having the volunteer hours on her resume will be beneficial**.** Volunteer work is never negative and even aside from a resume, it makes people feel good about themselves and like they have purpose**.**

To reach our target audience, first we sent out a Facebook message and got no replies**.** We decided to amend the way we got the word out (because lack of response) by creating a more personal approach**.** We realized that even if we personally went to a few friends each, it was a lot easier and more effective to collect old clothes, canned food, and school supplies that they certainly didn't want or need anymore**.** Just like we all discovered in our own closets, our friends realized they had several bags of clothes they weren't using**.** Score!! We made it easier for our friends by throwing the bags in our cars and taking it to Christian Help ourselves**.** Sometimes if you want to get something done, you gotta do it yourself**.** That was much more effective**.**

We discovered there are many ways to channel a message**.** We used Facebook, text messaging, and we created flyers**.** Just to reiterate, the best channel was the most personal channel, which was text messages to our friends and family asking to meet up to personally discuss exactly what we wanted to do**.** We thought it would be best to use as many channels as possible**.**

There are several different theories in the field of persuasion**.** In most cases, people use a mixture of all of them**.** One of the theories we focused on is The Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA)**.** This is appropriate because TRA has five components: behavioral belief, belief evaluation, belief strength, normative beliefs, and motivation to comply**.** A lot of people did not know much about Christian Help so it was our job to educate them in a way that would lead to positive belief evaluations**.** Almost everyone will have positive views about the facts/thoughts listed in our flyer and according to the information we provided them**.** The belief strength may change person to person, so we tried to increase their belief strength by making them realize just how badly people suffer if they do not have the essentials for life**.** For example, someone may not feel strongly about whether or not other people are clothed on a cold night or fed on a regular basis because they do not really think about it**.** It is hard to identify with something we, ourselves, have not gone through**.** We changed their belief strength by informing them just how bad the situation is, such as how starvation is right around the corner for some of these people, and that is certainly not pleasant**.** Giving them facts about the freezing or starvation made them feel a little bit stronger about helping people with warm clothes and some food, making their belief strength higher, which was important for our persuasive goal**.** We also gave people the option of donating time volunteering if they did not have any extra clothing to donate**.** To our surprise, we did have a taker on the volunteering**.**

For normative beliefs, everyone should feel positively about helping out those in need**.** We had one person who wanted to donate but wished to remain anonymous because she did not want to be contacted by the organization in the future**.** We informed this person that we would not be giving Christian Help any information on the people donating so this person had nothing to worry about**.** By passing out the flyers, we gave people the option of dropping off donations directly to the organization**.** We encouraged people to be proud of donating and emphasized how it is socially desirable**.**

With motivation to comply, most people we figured that most people are motivated to comply with close friends and family**.** Because we asked close friends and family to comply, we had very motivation among our target audience**.** We spoke very highly of the organization making it seem more desirable**.**

We also used Self Perception Theory to persuade people**.** Self Perception relies on two basic assumptions: first that we learn about our attitudes by looking to our behavior and second that when we are unsure of how we feel, we look to our behavior to determine how we feel**.** In order to successfully use this theory we had to induce the people to act and control the external factors so that they would make a dispositional attribution**.** We induced people to act by asking people whom we were close with to donate**.** Because we asked people whom we already knew there was more pressure for them to engage in a behavior**.** We controlled external factors by driving to pick up the donations and giving them plenty of times notice to get prepared**.** We chose this theory because it is most effective when people already have a positive attitude about the issue**.** We do not know many people who feel negatively about donating goods to those in need**.** Overall, we had a successful turnout because of this theory**.**

Door-in-the-face goes hand in hand with Self Perception Theory**.** One specific example of this strategy is how we collected clothing from the dry cleaners**.** Tanisha went in and asked if she could have all the clothing that had been left there for a month without being claimed**.** She did not expect to get everything, because that is such a short period of time**.** She haggled with the owner until she came to an agreement with her that she could take everything that had been left there for over five years**.** If she just would have asked for whatever was available she probably would have walked out with just a few shirts**.** She started off asking for a very big donation but in the end she got what she expected**.** She did not actually expect to get everything that had been left there for a month**.** Everything that has not been picked up over five years is much more reasonable**.**

The project was successful**.** In order to be a good persuader, you must be credible**.** In our case, considering we were working with people we already knew or businesses familiar with us and Christian Help, our extrinsic credibility was high, which is helpful**.** Our intrinsic credibility, or credibility during and after the delivery of a message, was high as well**.** We looked professional, we gave them vital information, and we expressed how important (and passionate) we felt about donating to Christian Help**.**

Our ethos, or the ethics of the source, logos, the logic, and pathos, or the emotional appeals, were all in tact**.** What we were trying to persuade was logical and we used emotional and central appeals as well, all helping our credibility**.** Our credibility in general was higher because the people close to us know we are high in character, good will, and competence**.** All three of these factors help someone be credible**.** Once again, yelling at a stranger to donate clothes the next time they're downtown won't be as affective in this case because they have no clue if we are credible**.** Sure, we could dress nice and seem competent, but the interaction is too short to establish any kind of legitimate credibility**.**

In our persuasive message, we were proactive**.** Friends, family, and local businesses we were familiar with were more likely to comply with what we were wanting them to do**.** We made it easier for them by putting more work in ourselves**.** TRA helped us predict who would have a positive behavior and who was more likely to donate**.** What we actually *did* was important because we personally knew (and made sure) that by collecting clothes from family and friends, that it made it to Christian Help**.** The flyer could help inform, but us being proactive helped get the donations directly to Christian Help**.**

Once again, we chose these particular strategies because a proactive approach was the most successful and necessary way to get donations**.** Not only did Stephen and Tyler have 6 bags of clothes in their closet alone, so did most of the other people**.** Students are very busy**.** We were willing to take a little time out of our day to help our friends out, and ultimately help Christian Help**.**

We each had unique experiences with implementing the message. For Shannon it was pretty casual. She texted all of her friends in Morgantown asking for clothing that they no longer wore. She was very successful. A lot of clothing was collected and it only took about three hours of driving around until the final stop at Christian Help. Tanisha had a different experience she felt that she had to get involved with the local drycleaners in her area because of how much excess clothes were not being picked up by the customers that forgot about the clothes they dropped off years before hand. She needed a reason to get the manager Pamela to let her take the clothes to Christian Help. It really helped by explaining that during the holidays there are so many people who are truly in need that could use the clothes that others forgot. Also, people in her family over Thanksgiving break were more than willing to give her at least one item of clothing in total helping the overall experience of persuading people to donate for her. She thought it was very successful because she wasn’t expecting to get as much as she did. Her family and friends thought that it was a wonderful way in giving back to the community, and to help her with her class made it more of a reason to donate.

Tyler's personal experience with implementing the persuasive was very effective. Tyler is from Morgantown and his family has been involved with Christian Help for years. This affected his credibility in a positive way. His grandfather re-organized the food pantry to make sure that each family received nutritious and easy to make foods and his grandmother started the men's career closet. Tyler has volunteered at Christian help for years and is passionate about the work that they do. People were able to read his enthusiasm while he was using the persuasive message, which made it more successful. Several people at Tyler's work place, MedExpress, have donated or plan to donate in the very near future. Many people at MedExpress are parents and are looking forward to donating to the toy drive in December.

Stephen's experience with Christian help was extremely positive and motivating. “Personally, I've never done much charity. I've been on a couple of mission trips to Europe, but when it comes to helping people right here at home, I've been absent. I truly found it rewarding. I've heard to Christian Help, but after Tyler told me more about it, I became more aware of exactly the services they provide. I also wasn't aware of how many low income and actual homeless people were in town. It only takes a little to do a lot and make a difference. My friends, as well as the rest of the group, were very willing to rummage through their stuff, especially when we helped. I discovered that if you want to really be involved with something, you must be proactive and get out there. This was a great experience, we did get a lot of clothes, and I'll definitely continue to be involved with the organization.”

Over all our persuasive message was successful. We recognized that our original plan of the Facebook message and setting up a table in the Mountainlair was flawed because it was too broad. Nobody internally processed the message because being on mass media, it was ignored. We are very happy with the amount of donations we collected and we believe this was the best way to implement our persuasive message.

