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SUBJECT: An Impact Analysis of *tpt*'s "Homeless Youth: Finding Home"
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

We considered the impact of Homeless Youth: Finding Home to understand why it has been so successful, and how its impact might have been (or could be) enhanced. Our objective was to identify "powerful questions," that if asked early and throughout the collaborative production process would support continued success of the Minnesota Channel and its partners.

To create stories of impact, emotion must be wrapped around facts to inspire action (Dickman, 2003). Therefore, establishing audience relevance (i.e. emotional connection) to the documentary topic is of utmost importance. If the topic does not initially resonate with an audience member's paradigm, relevance may be achieved through connection to the source of the message (e.g. an audience member's respect for the person who introduced them to the film). Relevance also remains critical to a documentary's message being absorbed by its viewer, and thus, the likelihood that an audience member will be inspired to action.

To understand the impact of Homeless Youth: Finding Home, we considered 'impact' through the lenses of "breadth" of exposure and "depth" of audience engagement. We consider the fulcrum between breadth and depth to be the impact on the target audience.

To assess the impact of Homeless Youth: Finding Home (HYFH), we employed the following methodologies:

- In-depth interviews with HYFH viewers
- An academic literature review
- Surveys capturing pre- and post-experience feedback from first-time viewers of HYFH
- An interview with Professor Marco Yzer of the University of Minnesota

To link our findings to the production process, we organized our data into the categories listed below. These categorical groups are presented as non-linear, as we acknowledge that natural overlap exists between them.

- Collaboration
- Audience
- Content
- Distribution
- Supplemental Tools

As previously alluded, these five domains can be optimized when considered through the lenses of breadth and depth of impact. Our work suggests that *tpt* can influence both the breadth and depth of impact by implementing the following recommendations:

- Ensure a team-oriented collaboration with a diverse array of perspectives
- Identify target audiences
- Develop audience-specific objectives
- Create content that is relevant to the audience
- Form a distribution plan pre-production to maintain momentum
- Allocate resources pre-production for the creation of supplemental tools

We believe that these recommendations will foster a robust collaborative process, and additionally address both breadth of viewership and depth of audience engagement. When each recommendation is assessed for its potential to create impact, we believe that an ideal blend of impact can be obtained. Recognizing that each Minnesota Channel project is unique, our recommendations are intentionally broad, but we believe that if implemented, they can provide a framework to maximize impact in future collaborative endeavors.

COLLABORATION

Once objectives have been set and target audience determined, loop back and re-assess the composition of the Collaboration

The Minnesota Channel serves as the enabler of the collaborative story, and thus plays a key role in convening members whose perspectives and networks ultimately shape depth and breadth of impact.

Collaboration and Content

Collaborative members shape depth of impact by determining content. Therefore **assessing who is at the table is critical, along with identifying any barriers to participation.** Technology can be used to address barriers, along with the formation of a ‘buddy system’ in which incumbent collaborative members are tasked with representing input from absent groups. This responsibility strengthens the overall collaborative process by building ownership and distributing power. However, it is equally as important to consider if there are people at the table who can serve as barometers for how the story is being constructed. For instance, if group members all share the same paradigm (i.e. homeless youth service providers), they may inadvertently omit content that promotes audience engagement. One interviewee’s suggestion for improving the storytelling process was to “...have a member of the collaborative be from well outside the issue” to insure audience relevance.

Collaboration and Distribution

Collaborative partners also play a key role in shaping breadth of impact by promoting distribution. Each partner’s professional and personal networks determine initial reach of the film, so identifying predicted reach during the planning process can create a baseline measure of impact while highlighting potential gaps in distribution. A ‘network analysis’ of partner networks may be helpful, as it generates a visual map and broad list of stakeholders who are (or should) be targeted in the distribution process. In the case of HYFH, adjacent professional spheres such as school administrators, parent-teacher associations, coaches, mental health providers, and the business community were all identified as potential distribution gaps. We also recommend a ‘loop-back’ during the planning process to re-assess whether networks are being effectively utilized.

Collaboration Management

Since collaboration composition wields so much influence on film content, it is vital to contemplate the various (and potentially incongruous) objectives of collaboration members. Therefore we recommend that future collaborations **explore each partner’s motivation for participation** to ensure that competing interests are addressed.

Many interviewees in our research emphasized the great respect shown to collaborative partners and film participants throughout HYFH planning and production process. This sensitivity appears to cast a wide halo on trust among collaborative partners. One interviewee described this as, “The impressive part was

there was a real effort and consciousness on the part of *tpt* to be very ethical and conscientious about confidentiality, which made participating in the process easier, because as service providers it seems like that's always a fight, to not exploit the people you serve by telling their stories for your gain."

AUDIENCE

Early on, define the target audience and establish the realistic goal of impact for that audience. Start answering the question of "What will be relevant and credible to the target audience?"

Once the collaboration composition has been defined, critical next steps are to **define the target audience and identify what is relevant to them**. Our research indicated that relevance to HYFH occurred through audience affinity to the subject (i.e. 'That could be my daughter', or 'I know the spokesperson in the video'), credibility of the filmmaker (i.e. 'the facts are presented clearly,' and 'I know I Wilder/*tpt* is a trustworthy source'), and personal identification to setting (i.e. 'That porta potty is right across the street from my house'). By identifying the audience and what is relevant to them, realistic impact objectives can be determined. These objectives also help shape other potential areas to increase impact, such as the creation of effective post-production supplemental tools.

Project objectives can also shape desired 'takeaway messages' for the target audience. By identifying the ideal message that an audience member will absorb, content and emotions needed to inspire a desired response can be embedded in film content. For example, if a stated project objective is to increase the adoption of youth aging out of foster care by middle-class Latino families in the suburbs, include the perspective of a current foster parent of that targeted demographic. This vantage point is more powerful than hearing the 'takeaway message' from a service provider, as it increases personal relevance to the audience member.

CONTENT

Emphasize audience relevance in film content.

As previously discussed, one way to create stories of impact is to present concrete facts in a manner that is emotionally salient to the viewer. If the film content is not inherently relevant to the audience, their depth of involvement will be limited. Therefore, **establishing personal relevance** to the viewer is a critical component of the filmmaking process. In the case of Homeless Youth: Finding Home, it is reasonable to assume that most audience members have a pre-existing degree of interest, and therefore personal relevance, in the topic of homelessness. If an audience member does not have a pre-existing relationship to the topic, personal relevance may be developed through intellectual engagement and socially meaningful dialogue. Once audience engagement has been achieved, continued relevance remains critical to absorbing and retaining the information, and perpetuating the dissemination of the message.

Considering the necessity of personal relevance and the means to develop it, increased film impact may be achieved through **intentionality of content**. Reflecting on the primary demographic of a *tpt* audience, HYFH could have included content specific to this population; for example, a new foster family in white suburbia describing their journey to become foster parents or the similarity of a film participant to that of a viewer. As one interviewee described:

The stories about these particular youth...is really powerful in its own right. Each audience member seemed to dive on to one of the stories. A lot of people are really impacted by the two girls, where the one ended up getting kicked out of college because she didn't have a

place to stay. A lot of people can relate to that, like 'I have a kid in college,' and 'What would they do during the summer if they couldn't come home?'

It is necessary to thoughtfully analyze the subsets of the population you wish to engage through the film content, and then build programming which is tailored to maximize engagement of this audience through personal relevance. Post-production supplemental 'tools' also increase depth of audience engagement.

Balancing Content for Action

It is a natural tendency for individuals in an overly complex world to disengage from issues they find to be overwhelming, or outside of their own reality. Therefore, it is necessary to prevent dismissal of a film message by **promoting personal relevance in content and providing a spectrum of 'action steps'** with which the audience member can feel empowered to act.

Promoting personal relevance also requires that the audience have context to in which to shape their opinions. One interviewee who used HYFH as an educational tool described this well when he stated:

HYFH is a catalyst (for conversation), but probably more than anything it gives it provides context...I mean its good because when we're going out into the community, we're going to the suburbs, we're not going to have someone from South High School ask us to come in and talk to them about homelessness. I mean, anywhere between 10 and 20 percent of the kids in South are homeless. So we're going to Hopkins, we're going to Eagan, we're going to Edina, White Bear Lake, we're usually going to a pretty affluent school or parish, and we're sitting down and having conversations with them...and when you're sitting in the middle of a very clean, well-kept meeting room...those videos help with the context.

How to graphically illustrate the film's message is also an important consideration, and enhances depth of audience engagement. For example academic research calls for 'emotion to inspire action', but also emphasizes the need to understand the target audience's perceptions of content (Dickman, 2003). For instance, if the target audience perceives the content to be upsetting or traumatic, they may disengage or reject the message all together, therefore awareness of the potential emotional reaction of the audience may inform how to best maximize impact. The Metro-Wide Engagement on Shelter and Housing's (MESH) video called 'Land of 10,000 Homeless' was cited by one interviewee as successful at eliciting emotion while simultaneously engaging the audience:

The MESH video was really powerful because you were given entry to a world that a lot of people don't have access to...and I think most people were appalled by the conditions when they see the floor mats on the ground a couple inches away from each other. It also has some footage of the annual homeless memorial march, and that's really powerful. I always cry when I watch the MESH video, and I've seen it probably 50 times, and it's interesting because I don't cry when I watch the *tpt* film...

When considering films about homelessness, one respondent explained that if the audience is unfamiliar with the subject matter, seeing a film about it could result in feelings of guilt, anger, or sadness, and cause them to disengage. Research shows that this tendency to disengage is natural and can be counter-acted if concrete, tangible 'action steps' are offered to empower the viewer (Yzer, 2010). Our research confirmed this, as interviewees cited the provision of 'action steps' through the Youth Moving Forward Party in a Box' to be greatly beneficial because "they increased viewer engagement" and "fostered feelings of 'satisfaction' to be able to be part of the solution."

DISTRIBUTION

Frequency of exposure and mode of distribution greatly affect breadth and depth of impact.

Maximum breadth and depth of documentary impact is related directly to effective film distribution. Professor Marco Yzer from the University of Minnesota emphasized that **broad and frequent exposure to film content** is fundamental to an individual's internalization of the film message, and consequently their likelihood to take action due to the film's message. Therefore, planning intentional 'follow-up' or 're-release' events related to the film's message are vital in enhancing impact. For HYFH, this could mean allocating resources upfront for future events or distribution strategies.

Audience engagement is also reliant upon the **modes of film distribution**. For purposes of this paper, 'modes of distribution' refers to from *whom* and *how* an audience member learns of the film (i.e. through an opinion leader, a friend, social networking site, newspaper, etc.) Professor Yzer emphasized the growing body of research that supports a 'two-step flow of communication,' which highlights the importance of mode of distribution in film effect, with the greatest impact on audience behavior resulting from secondary exposure, NOT primary film message (Katz, 1957). Please see Figure 1 below.

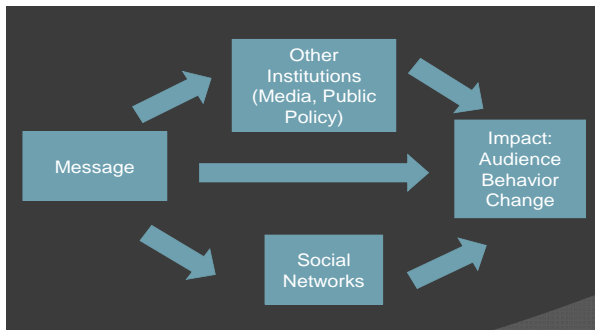


Fig. 1: Two-Step Flow of Communication (Katz, 1957)

For an audience member with little to no previous exposure to the film content, impact due to a passive viewing experience (i.e. randomly viewing the film on television) is minimal. However, this impact is heightened by personal relevance to the film, either in the form of personal connection to film content, or exposure to film message through a secondary, trusted mode of distribution. In the case of HYFH, this secondary exposure may occur through a trusted 'opinion leader' (notable figure in the community), a friend (potentially someone from a social networking site), or presentation of the film in a favorite media outlets. All of our survey respondents cited from friends or colleagues as the most effective way to receive information about social issues, while only 67% felt that TV was. (Please see Appendix II for brief summary of survey results)

As previously mentioned, optimal film impact through distribution may be enhanced through a network analysis (or mapping) during the planning phase. This process helps to identify expected impact from distribution, natural distribution patterns, areas of overlap, and gaps where distribution should be emphasized. This exercise also highlights individuals/organizations that may be on the periphery of the issue-area, but still have a stake in the film's success. In the case of HYFH, this may include school systems, juvenile detention, mental health care providers, hospitals, the business community, etc.

SUPPLEMENTAL TOOLS

The use of intentional supplemental tools enhances audience engagement and potential for action.

HYFH was considered to be of high quality by our interviewees due to its ability to resonate with a variety of audiences; it speaks to young and old, affluent and working class, service providers, potential adoptive parents, legislators, and homeless youth themselves. This versatility naturally increases breadth of impact, but could be further enhanced by considering *why* it appeals to those audiences. This understanding helps to determine *how* to effectively engage a particular audience with supplemental ‘tools.’ Tools that have been employed by our interviewees to increase depth of viewer engagement include:

- Discussion guides
- Example letters to elected officials
- A Twin Cities-based list of organizations seeking volunteers
- Instructions on how to organize a donation drive
- Youth Moving Forward’s ‘Party in a Box’
- ‘Sign and mail’ postcards addressed to county commissioners

Tools Increase Impact

Research points to the fact that supplemental **tools complement film content when intentionally designed to create impact**. According to Professor Yzer, “...conversation is a retrieval-prompting stimulus, it encourages remembrance of an array of related thoughts...” (Southwell & Yzer, 2007). In other words, an audience member that anticipates a facilitated ‘question and answer’ session post-film viewing, tends to pay closer attention to content and engage with the film message more effectively.

Other literature supports this as well. According to Whitaker et. al. (2004) “...discussion ostensibly provides motive, incentive, and skills to discern the information from media reports necessary to mobilize and act upon media messages.” (pp. 446) Therefore, we recommend that future collaborative teams consider supplemental tools from the beginning, to maximize audience engagement and impact. A few ways *tpt* could accomplish this is to allocate funds upfront for the creation of supplemental tools, and promote the use of supplemental tools during the distribution process. Whitaker et. al. (2004) found that the viewing experience perpetuates the recognition of social problems and barriers to solutions, whereas the use of supplemental tools fosters creation of, and identification with, new solutions for action:

The video viewing was more successful in changing perceptions about barriers than in changing perceptions about solutions. In contrast, the facilitated group discussion that followed the video was more successful in changing perceptions about solutions than about barriers (pg. 385).

The same authors found that viewing the video alone had a greater impact on the participants ability to discuss changes to barriers, whereas the facilitated discussion afterwards was instrumental in promoting thought about solutions.

Lastly, Rojas et. al. (2005) found that “...participants in the event (sic) became more aware of the problem, more likely to discuss the issue with others in the future, and more likely to participate in community activities aimed at addressing the issue” when involved in a post-viewing discussion.

The aforementioned data support the claim that facilitated dialogue has a positive correlation with audience engagement and community impact.

SUMMARY

In conclusion, our overall recommendation is to keep the 'end in mind' and re-visit original objectives throughout the collaborative planning process. We also recommend these strategies:

- Consider composition: ensure a team-oriented collaboration with a diverse array of perspectives
- Identify target audiences
- Develop audience-specific objectives
- Create content that is relevant to the audience
- Form a distribution plan pre-production to maintain momentum
- Allocate resources pre-production for the creation of supplemental tools

A collaborative project provides an opportunity to maximize outcomes through the sharing of resources, expertise, and energy. The Minnesota Channel and *tpt* have proven to be highly successful in convening effective collaborations and creating effective films that translate to broad community impact. We applaud *tpt*'s success, and hope that our recommendations provide a framework to promote further impact in future Minnesota Channel/*tpt* collaborative endeavors.

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APPENDIX I

Powerful questions

Collaboration:

- Who is at the table?
- Does the collaboration represent an array of perspectives on the issue?
- Are cross-sector voices represented?
- Are there any barriers to participation?
- Are there people at the table who can serve as barometers for success?
- Do partner objectives align?
- What are participant's motivations for participating in the collaboration?

- How do we know if we've achieved success?

Audience:

- Who is the target audience?
- What 'message' do we want the audience to take away from watching the film?
- What will be relevant and credible to the target audience?
- Will the content elicit a particular emotional response in the target audience?

Distribution:

- What are the professional and personal networks of collaborative partners?
- Are there gaps in the distribution network?
- Who is responsible for distributing the film?
- What is our baseline for success?

Supplemental Tools:

- What supplemental tools are currently available?
- How do we suspect partner organizations will use the film and supplemental tools?
- What objective do we seek by utilizing supplemental tools?
- Are there avenues for partners to share supplemental tools or ideas for tools?

APPENDIX II

Survey Responses:

- 83% liberal, Masters students, 24-29
- All cited online newspapers or from friends or colleagues as most effective way to receive info about social issues, only 67% said TV
- All learned a moderate amount about youth homelessness from the film
- Most moderately interested in the issue after watching
- Emotions listed:
 - Sadness by half
 - Anger/Outrage by half
 - Frustration by one third