Youth Impact Communication

Saving Lives Together: A Cross-Cultural Effort To Build An Animal Shelter

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Summary

Saving Lives Together: A Cross-Cultural Effort to Build an Animal Shelter is a project initiated by five grade-10 students from Hefei Thomas School. The project, started from the end of 2019, is an extension and expansion of the efforts that leader He Xin and his four friends and teammates had made: helping George's Animal Shelter and its owner James George, an expatriate in Hefei, Anhui Province in China, to increase its impact and help more stray dogs to find home.

The project has a key message: One Shelter, One World. The group chose this slogan for the power and determination it embodies. Based on this key message, the group employed various platforms of media to spread the information and message to a wide range of audiences. So far, the group has used eight media platforms: WeChat public account, documentary, newspaper, public speaking contest, Douyin (Tiktok), exhibition boards, newsletters, and online survey. Each form has its own merits and weaknesses, which the group has evaluated based on their performances.

Compared with traditional channels, "new media" is more flexible and versatile to put ideas into practice. For instance, because of its convenience and multi-functionality, the group uses WeChat as a witness to record all of the activities and events, thus archiving them for future references. Also, by posting short videos on Douyin (Tiktok), the group is able to share the activities of the shelter instantly with viewers across the country. When the group want their appeals to be more than pathos, they have introduced a well-designed online questionnaire to collect data and statistics about people's knowledge and opinion of stray dogs. Finally, the group has made a short documentary and posted it on Bilibili, a major video website, which is now gaining increasing attention through WeChat Moments and group chats.

One particular traditional media that the group has used is the 21st Century Teens Senior, a major English newspaper in China with a large circulation among teenagers. Three articles about animal protection have been published on the newspaper in the project time.

Besides spreading the message, the group has contributed in other ways. By starting an online fundraiser, the group has collected more than 20,000RMB for George's shelter. The group assisted James George and other foreigners during

Hefei Adoption Day in which they acted as translators. They also translated for James on other occasions such as when the medical companies donated vaccines to the shelter.

This project has made an impact: James George wrote a thank-you letter to the principal of Hefei Thomas School; more people have known George's shelter through the platforms, and they have contributed either financially or spiritually to help the cause; students from other schools in Hefei joined them through writing articles or designing T-shirts and the cross-school collaboration is in progress.

He Xin and his friends have established the Little Animal Protection Society at their high school, and by doing so, they hope to start a tradition that would continue to make impacts in the future.

📄 Summary of the project

Identify the Topic

Topic Description

key words
-Animal Shelter volunteers
-Cross-cultural communication

Five grade-10 students from Hefei Thomas School volunteer at George's Animal Shelter in Hefei, China. Full of affection and patience, they help the founder James George, an Englishman, as well as many foreigners in Hefei, to overcome language and cultural barriers and build and maintain a lovely shelter for homeless dogs. The team explore many ways to make more people aware of the situation that urban stray animals are facing and get involved in homeless animal protection.

📄 George's Animal Shelter (1)
📄 George's Animal Shelter (2)
📄 George's Animal Shelter (3)

Why it is important

Stray dogs have become a serious problem in Chinese cities, and the public are only concerned about it when some tragic event happens, such as a homeless dog biting someone on the street. What most people are unaware of is the fact that homeless animals need professional care, protection and a lot of love. Meanwhile, for those who love animals and want to protect them, they need information to better contribute to the cause. For instance, vaccination for dogs so that they won't spread disease and that adoptions are better options than buying pets. What's particularly interesting in this case is that Mr. George and his friends are foreigners and non-residents, and yet they are devoting themselves to helping the city and the animal residents. As English language and foreign culture learners, we are also very interested in knowing how Mr. George deals with the complex social and cultural difference to run a successful animal shelter, and more importantly, how we might help him to maintain his success.

Project Objective

By employing various forms of media, including videos, print media and the internet, we hope to expand the impact so that more people would get involved and be informed of the knowledge of stray dogs' protection, animal adoption, the negative impacts of abandoning dogs, dog food and housing, vaccination, etc. More importantly, we hope that this project is a documentation of our collective efforts to save the lives of our animal friends.

Identify the Target Audience

Who Are They?

People nowadays are eager to be free from loneliness and anxiety. They demand affection, companionship, and relaxation. And to kids, they need animal friends to accompany them, not indulged in computer games all day long.

The target audience covers all the age and is not related to whether they are rich or not. The project, however, can't cover all the public. It is feasible for project members to target teenagers and their parents.

Why Are They?

Meeting pet animals and stray animals in residential communities, parks or many campuses, teenagers and their parents have been familiar to these animals. When getting close to to the project, they are prone to be greatly influenced. Besides, project members are all 16-year-old high school students. It is easier for teenagers to communicate with and hence impact one another. So it is the case with their parents, who belong to the same generation.

What is your scope?

With feasibility and efficiency in mind, this project narrows down the target audience further to the teenagers and their parents nearby who are accessible, living at the same residential area, at the same schools or friends online. After getting impacted, this scope can influence their friend circles in turn.

How to reach them?

Project members have explored the features of this scope, specifically in media preference, physical route and recognition ways, which are demonstrated as follows.

As to media choice, this scope prefer new media, such as Wechat, QQ, or Douyin. Traditional media such as newspapers, blogs or magazines are fading out.

Physical routes, a very important way in effective face-to-face communication, are not that important, since we can impact with different media channels without the necessity to live together in persons.

As to the way of recognition, this scope are open-minded, easy to accept new-born phenomena. They welcome change and challenge.

Identify the Key Message

| The Key Message

One Shelter, One World.

The message that we try to send through this slogan has two meanings. The first is that we, animals and humans, live in one world. However, many people place themselves on the dominant role of the natural world instead of viewing our relationship with the animals as a reciprocal one. This point of view brings many troubles to us and to the natural world. Therefore, we want to stress, with our slogan, that we're all in this together and that what we do to the animals eventually will have an impact on ourselves. The second level of meaning we're trying to imply is that the shelter is a multi-cultural effort, with the founder being a British, and the volunteers and supporters Chinese and expatriates from all around the world. Thus, the shelter is a little world where, despite of the different cultures and backgrounds, people are trying to reach a common goal: protect the stray dogs.

We hope to send the message mentioned above to our target audiences, who are mainly high school students and their parents, and reinforce our values and goals through this simple slogan.

| The Tactics Behind

One Shelter, One World.

Both tactics used.

Emotionally, the shelter has witnessed successful collaboration and deep friendship among the founder, foreign volunteers and Chinese volunteers.

What's more important, a harmonious relationship has been demonstrated between dogs and humans who are living on the earth together.

Rationally, quantitative analysis is also used to exhibit and prove cooperative efforts.

Choose the Platform

| The Platform Chosen

Idea of Integrated Communication Mix is preferred, that is to say, various platforms will be chosen and function as a whole.
WeChat Account is the first and foremost choice. This platform is very powerful, which can support various formats, including pictures, stories or videos etc. Project leader has run a WeChat official account for three years and has won a certain number of supporters. It is feasible and efficient to set up a specific column"Shelter" on the existing WeChat Account.

📄 Column "Shelter" on an existing WeChat

| The Alternative Platforms

Douyin, a Tiktok Chinese version. (QR code is attached.)
The most popular English newspapers for teenagers. (The newspaper's cover is attached.)
Outdoor exhibition boards
A survey online
A documentary
Public speaking
Newsletter

All the eight platforms are to be carefully analyzed in the following modules.

The Criteria to Evaluate

We chose to integrate different platforms to present our project because each of them has their own merits and limitations. We believe that by flexibly employing these platforms, they would help bring out the best outcome.

Platform 1: WeChat Account
Criteria:
a. Popularity. Nearly everyone on WeChat would subscribe to some WeChat Accounts to read during their spare time. It is one of the most popular forms of We Media in China.
b. Clicking Rate. It is easy to see how many people have read the post and how many people have subscribed the Account, which means they would follow up the progress of the project.
c. Form. WeChat Account allows for pictures, videos and words to coexist in a same article, which gives us space to be more informative and creative.
d. Feedback. We can check the comments left by viewers of the post in the comment section and how many of people share the post to others through posting on their WeChat Moments and through clicking on the "Read It."
e. Cost. There is no cost to upload articles on WeChat Account.
f. Preparation time. We spent an average of 6 hours per week to write articles, edit them and trace their feedback.

Platform 2: Douyin（Chinese version of Tiktok)
Criteria:
a.Popularity. Tiktok is the most popular platform for people to make and share short videos online.
b.Clicking rate and the rate of likes. The clicking rate of the short video can be seen and is a direct indicator of how popular the video is.
c.Spreading speed. Sharing the short videos through Tiktok is easy and quick.
d.Preparation Time. It is easy to make short videos on Tiktok or upload the prepared short video to the platform. Also, unlike WeChat Account, which only allows for one post a day, you can upload as many videos as you want on Tiktok.
e.Cost. There is no cost to upload the videos on Tiktok. However, if we use the video-promoting software on Tiktok, there will be 100RMB for each clip.

Platform 3: 21st Century English Teen Senior

Criteria:
a.Popularity and authority. As a subsidiary of China Daily, one of the most influential English-language newspapers in China, the 21st Century English Teen Senior is also able to reach a wide range of circulation, especially among children and teenagers. However, as a traditional form of media, it lacks the timeliness and interaction which usually could be found in new media forms.
b.Preparation Time. It took almost a month to publish an article on the newspaper.
c.Cost. There isn't any cost to publish articles on this newspaper.

Platform 4: Outdoor Exhibition
Criteria:
a.Popularity and accessibility. Although the outdoor exhibition won't reach a very large range of audiences, it has the advantage of directly facing the target audiences (teenagers and their parents) and impressing them with the pictures and words on the exhibition board.
b.Preparation Time: It took us two weeks to prepare for the exhibition boards and we plan to hold the exhibit in April for at least two days during the weekend.
c.Cost. Designing and making the exhibition boards cost us around 1000RMB.

Platform 5: Documentary
Criteria:
a.Popularity and authority. The documentary is an efficient way to draw more attention to our project because unlike the short videos, a documentary has enough time and space to show the details of how the shelter has been operated and what we have done to raise the awareness of stray dog protection and adoption.
b.Preparation Time: It will take us four weeks to collect the materials (pictures and short videos), shoot some scenes, edit, add subtitles (Chinese and English), dub and finally polish. Due to the coronavirus disease, we couldn't shoot as many scenes as we had planned, but we were able to work it out based on what we had.
c.Costs. Our budget for the documentary is 1000RMB.

Platform 6: Public Speaking
Criteria:
a.Popularity and authority. The audiences are the ones present in the speaking contest (more than 300 students), and the message could be spread efficiently through the speaking itself. What's more, after the leader He Xin had won the first prize of the contest, its impact and influence was expanded through the newsletters of He Xin's high school, which reported this event.
b.Preparation Time. He Xin took three hours per week to prepare for the contest.
c.Costs. There was no cost in participating in this contest.

Platform 7: Survey
Criteria:

a.Popularity and accessibility. We created this questionnaire through Tecent Questionnaire, which was very convenient and could access to most of our of friends online, who scan the QR and can directly fill in the questionnaire.
b.Efficiency. We collected important information and data regarding people's attitudes and knowledge towards pets and stray dogs, which would help us improve our work at the shelter. It was also a great way to raise awareness because many people who don't keep pets or adopt stray animals also took the survey, and it increased their knowledge of this field.
c.Preparation time. We spent four weeks to design the questionnaire, give it out and collect the feedback.
d.Costs. There was no cost in making the questionnaire.

Platform 8: Newsletter of the Shelter
Criteria:
a.Popularity and authority. We plan to issue the newsletters to the visitors in our shelter and during the events like the Adoption Day. It adds a sense of formality to our endeavor.
b.Efficiency. The newsletter is an efficient and direct way to keep those interested in our cause updated with what we have done for the past three months.
c.Preparation time. We plan to issue the newsletter every three months, so for each issue, it would not take us too much time to prepare (around two weeks to design, edit and print)
d.Costs. The paper version of the newsletter was quite costly, so we plan to replicate them online (an e-version) and spread them through our WeChat Account and WeChat groups.

This part is also shown in the article IMC? Yes! on WeChat official account (attached Gongzhonghao).

📄 IMC? Yes!

The Rating Sheet

Project members evaluated the different platforms,and made a SWOT analysis.
A separate rating sheet is uploaded here. The rating sheet is very effective, which indeed helps team members make a specific comparison and contrast among different platforms. Considering effectiveness and feasibility, team members made a decision to make good use of all these platforms.

📄 The Rating Sheet

Set the Agenda

Set the Agenda

To make the whole project feasible to carry out, project members break down the topic and transform one key message into various activities, which are promoted in a variety of media. To make it clear, project members made a specific agenda list, which is still open to add more.

📄 Agenda list

Design the Packages

Create and Track the Impact

| The Execution Plan

A separate PDF laying out our execution plan has been uploaded.

Since team members have decided to deploy a variety of media, the execution plan is made in details accordingly.

📄 Execution Plan

| Impact Statistics

The project members have tracked the impact in a statistical way. They made collaborative efforts on eight platforms and donation activities, which are analyzed respectively. Appendix 1-17 are attached accordingly.

(Impact statistics PDF is uploaded as Appendix 1, together with the other attachments listed Appendix 2-17.)

📄 Appendix 1: Impact statistics summary
📄 Appendix 2: Shelter, a special column on WeChat official account
📄 Appendix 3: Nine exhibition boards (each 180cm*80cm) focusing on project progress
📄 Appendix 4: A survey online on protecting stray animals
📄 Appendix 5: Questionnaire online and visualized feedback
📄 Appendix 6: Help stray animals; We are not alone.
📄 Appendix 7: Douyin ID (Tiktok) of George's animal shelter
📄 Appendix 8: A Douyin instant video "Baby, I am your big tree"
📄 Appendix 9: An article published on 21st Century Teens, "Dog day afternoon" by He Xin
📄 Appendix 10: An article published on 21st Century Teens, "Return of the shelter" by He Xin
📄 Appendix 11: An article published on 21st Century Teens, "Help a fluffy friend" by He Xin

Collect Feedback

Statistics only tell part of the impact. Anecdotal evidence of positive feedback abounds.

On Douyin platform, "Baby, I am your big tree." has been followed with377 comments. All of them are supportive and full of affection. Some said they would like to take part in protecting stray animals. Some sang high praise for James George respectfully. Some asked to adopt shelter dogs.

On Dreamore donation platform, there were many comments also. One impressive one was a mother donated in honor of herself and her niece respectively to show respect and support of such charity behavior.

And the unexpected positive feedback came from the founder of the animal shelter. James George wrote a thank-you letter to Hefei Thomas School where the project members learn. His recognition and support is very encouraging. (See appendix)

Review and Reflections

| Overall Self Check

This part is absent or not available temporarily.

| What Are Successful

Up to know, many parts of the project have been successfully carried out.

The project objective was set up at the very beginning. By employing various forms of media, including videos, print media and the internet, we hope to expand the impact so that more people would get involved and be informed of the knowledge of stray dogs' protection, animal adoption, the negative impacts of abandoning dogs, dog food and housing, vaccination, etc. More importantly, we hope that this project is a documentation of our collective efforts to save the lives of our animal friends.

We did it!

We are very proud of what we have done. In PDF Impact Statistics , memorable progress and successful impact have been demonstrated respectively on eight platforms. What's more important, the E-quarterly, Doyin ID and Column Shelter are open-ended, and more and more audience will join us to protect stray animals, not confined within the project time. Indeed animal lovers from Hefei No.1 high school and No. 8 hign school students have joined us. We project group are going to set up a cross-school animal protection society in the future.

And, it is greatly appreciated that we group members, together with other volunteers, Chinese or English-speakers, have very good collaboration. This project IS a documentation of our collective efforts to save the lives of our animal friends.

📄 Shelter（a special column on WeChat official account）
📄 Douyin ID
📄 Quarterly Journal of Volunteers

What to Improve

During the project period, the eight platforms have been fully used, working integratedly. But execution on two platforms turned out different from the expected. It is pity, infact. Two platforms, that is, public speaking and exhibition boards, should have been more powerful.

Team leader He Xin got the first prize in 21st English Speaking Contest in Ahui province. He voiced for protecting stray animals. This speech was supposed to address to the public with at least 300+ audience, but unfortunately owing to the epidemic situation, the final contest was carried out online.

And the exhibition boards have been fabulously designed, tracing our activities and knowledge of science populariation. We planned to address to the audience directly but they can now only be exhibited online.

The epidemic period is unexpected. But we are very proud and also lucky that we have integrated online and offline media from the very beginning so that we still make an impact powerfully. When this period is over, exhibition boards will be there greeting the friends on campus, or in parks.

Summarize Learnings

1. Successful collaboration is vitally important. Not merely among project members, but with the other volunteers at shelter also.
2. Clear agenda should be made to make sure the whole project could be carried out step by step.
3. Responsibility should be delegated to each member. No one can do all the project on his own.
4. we keep open-minded and get many creative ideas by brainstorming.

Team Credits

HE XIN （Team leader）

Responsible for organization, plan, execution, control and summary of the whole project.
Set up and ran the column Shelter on WeChat official account Peterworkshop.
Set up and ran TikTok account Peter_He2004.
Published a series of English articles in 21st Century Teens.
Won the first prize in 21st National English Speaking Competition (Anhui final).
One of the two chief editors of the documentary "Help Stray Animals; We are Not Alone". Responsible for scripts translation and dubbing.
Responsible for text editing of 9 exhibition boards.
Responsible for editing the inaugural issue of Animal Protection Volunteers, the quarterly journal.
Orgainzed fundraising and charity sale.

TU TIANYOU

Responsible for making graphic design in 9 exhibition boards.
Responsible for editing Quarterly Journal Animal Protection Volunteers Vol 2.
Participated in all the other project activities.

SHEN MINGQI

One of the two chief editors of the documentary.
Responsible for writing scripts and editing the documentary Help Stray Animals; We are Not Alone.
Responsible for the report on "Voluntary Work at Animal Shelter in Winter Vacation", published at WeChat official account of Hefei Thomas School.
Participated in all the other project activities.

XU JIAQI

Responsible for the survey online.
Designed the questionnaire concerning stray animal protection and launched it on

Tencent Questionnaire.
Responsible for the report on "Welcome to Finish a Questionnaire on Protecting Stray Animals", published at WeChat official account of Hefei Thomas School.
Participated in all the other project activities.

HU SHUHAN

Responsible for liaison and outreach.
Successfully raised fund (￥5000) from Anhui Huijian Medical company.
Participated in all the other project activities.

Judge Comments

" What is so great about this project is how well you have documented every single aspect of your communication plan, from strategy and work allocation to taking screenshots of social media posts. This is great from an academic perspective, but more importantly allows you to easily replicate or grow this project in the future. After all, while you focus heavily on individual shelters and personalities, you can certainly envision taking this project and replicating it in other communities. You've essentially given yourselves (or others) a template to re-create your project. Your digital presence is so ambitious and wide-ranging, and it's clear from your analytics that the work really paid off. But perhaps even more impressive was the offline activity — your volunteering, calendars and other content that not only makes its own significant impact but gives you imagery and information you can then put back into your digital content. For your video, it would have been nice to hear from your subjects — especially George, who seems to have such an interesting story. That could help break up the one-track audio and give even more authenticity to your reporting. "