



WRC Case Study: Individual Donors

Interview with Ms Kate Eddy, Supporter Marketing Manager, Platform 51

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About Platform 51

Platform 51, formerly known as YWCA England & Wales, is a registered charity. They changed their operating name to Platform 51 in 2010 because it more accurately represents who they are and what they do. 51% of people are female. Girls and women use us as a platform to have their say and help them through challenging times in their lives. Platform 51 is a member of World YWCA, a global network of women and girls working for justice, peace, health, human dignity and freedom.

Platform 51 supports girls and women to take control of their lives. Women today face problems that are often subtle or misunderstood. Despite shifts in attitude and changes in the law, women are often unheard, isolated and face discrimination. Girls and women are at the heart of all Platform 51 does. Their activities, services and campaigns are about things girls and women need and want.

Generally we run programmes from our women only centres which are in some of the most deprived areas of England and Wales. But we also work in schools, community centres, youth clubs, mother and baby units, prisons, online; anywhere, in fact, where we can make a difference.

History of how Platform 51 developed their individual donors

Platform 51 began investing in recruiting individual donors in 2002. Three paid staff are employed in the Supporter Marketing Team to promote Platform 51 to potential donors and retain and develop those donors. Donor details, marketing communications sent and donations received are recorded on a donor database.

Historically, Platform 51 had relied on grants from the UK government and funds raised through applications to trusts and foundations. Like all charities the need to attract funds outside government sources became more important. The attractiveness of money from individual donors is that it is unrestricted i.e. not earmarked for a specific project and the organisation can itself decide how best to use the money to meet its charitable purposes.

Regular giving by direct debit is the most useful way for individuals to give to charities because it provides predictable monthly or annual income. In 2010, the funds raised from individual donors make up 6-8% of Platform 51's revenue and considerable effort and resource is being put into increasing the amount raised in this way.

Direct mail

From around 2003 to 2005, Platform 51 recruited individual donors via cold direct mail (as did many other UK charities) and while donors acquired that way are still loyal regular donors, Platform 51 believe that that approach is no longer effective for acquiring new donors. This is because the market was saturated throughout the 2000s and potential donors born post-war do not respond to cold direct mail approaches as well as the generations born pre-war.

Face-to-face and door-to-door fundraising

In 2004 Platform 51 tested the donor acquisition method of 'face to face' fundraising which was then in its infancy. This involves recruiters talking to people in shopping centres and busy streets and persuading them to sign up to direct debit donations. The test showed that for Platform 51 at that time the costs of running that type of programme outweighed the benefits because the rate of donors cancelling was too high.

Platform 51 now recruits new regular donors via 'door to door' fundraising. They outsource the work to a specialist agency who recruit the fundraisers and Platform 51 work with the agency to select where the door knocking will take place and to train the fundraisers. The challenge is to find potential donors who are interested in Platform 51's work and who can afford to make regular donations for around five years or more.

Door knocking takes place in urban areas close to where there are Platform 51 centres so that fundraisers can use a local interest angle when asking for donations to general funds. It's easier to target financially secure potential supporters by the neighbourhood they live in than by stopping them on the street in a city centre. Platform 51 has been fortunate to be able to utilise some capital to invest in the recruitment and retention of donors. In financial year 2009-2010, 11p in every pound spent by the organisation was invested in generating further funds. There is an ongoing programme of engagement, retention and development including asking donors each year if they would like to increase their donation. The objective is to keep regular donors involved and interested in supporting the work of Platform 51 for as long as possible.

The Supporter Marketing Team keep the donor database up to date with information on each donor, including how they like to be communicated with e.g. mail or email, how much they have donated, what their interests are, contact details etc. Platform 51 donors receive regular newsletters with a thank you message for their ongoing support. The newsletters typically include examples of the work they are helping to fund and other ways to get involved, including

fundraising events they can get involved with such as charity draws, walking and running events, organising local fundraising events or writing to their elected representatives about issues Platform 51 is campaigning on.

Funds raised from individual donors can be worth 25% more through gift aid. This well-known scheme allows registered charities to claim back the basic rate of tax already paid on donations by the donor and is currently worth 25p for every pound donated by UK taxpayers.

For further information on how to register with HMRC and set up your organisation to claim gift aid see www.tax-effective-giving.org.uk.

Successful individual donor programme 'must-dos'!

In order to run an effective individual donor programme, make sure you do the following things:

- Develop a positive message about the work of your organisation that sensitively portrays the issues that the service users are facing yet also conveys the need for funds. Using case studies in communications to donors is vital to capture people's interest. Platform 51 makes sure that service users featured in case studies give informed consent and have the final say in how information about themselves is presented. See Platform 51's website for examples of case studies: www.platform51.org
- Your website should be designed with potential donors in mind and have prominently displayed ways for people to donate online and sign up for email newsletters.
- Record all necessary donor information in a systematic way on a database and keep this information up to date. Observe and be seen to observe data protection rules as laid out in the Data Protection Act 1998 as donors need to know their information is being appropriately dealt with.
- Create a leaflet outlining the charity/organisation's need for funds which includes a donation form and the URL for your online donation page – make this available in centres, at reception, at events - wherever your organisation has a public face.
- Staff can be the greatest promoters of their work and (without detracting from their focus on the service users) are often in an excellent position to identify potential donors, run events, provide case studies to use in newsletters, etc.
- Make sure you ask donors to gift aid their donations and claim the gift aid to make their donations worth 25% more.
- Invest in resources and, if at all possible, dedicated staff to develop and manage recruitment, retention and development strategies for individual donors.

- Consider the benefits (and costs) of outsourcing some of the marketing and administrative functions. There are companies whose expertise is in this area and can more efficiently and effectively undertake some of the tasks, leaving your organisation to focus on the work itself. Look out for free assistance as well e.g. The Media Trust can assist with pro bono marketing services and training in marketing – see their website <http://www.mediatrust.org>. Other useful sources of low cost training and advice include the Institute of Fundraising (www.institute-of-fundraising.org.uk) and the FSI, which was set up specifically to assist small UK charities which help build happier, safer and more supportive communities (www.thefsi.org). Online and offline donation administration also requires resourcing, either solely in-house or with the help of not-for-profit organisations such as the Charities Aid Foundation (CAF) – see www.cafonline.org.
- Ensure all financial auditing requirements are met - speak to your auditor or finance department to make sure administrative processes will leave an audit trail to account for the donations
- Keep your donors connected to your work with regular information and events.

The value to Platform 51 of investing in recruiting and retaining loyal, regular individual donors is more than just the valuable non-earmarked income they generously contribute. If donors are really engaged with the organisation's work, they may also volunteer their time to support a local centre, increase the amount that they give or recommend that their friends also offer their support and ultimately, perhaps they will consider leaving a donation in their will. It's hard to put an instant cash value on these benefits, but if you look after our individual donors properly they will look after the organisation's work over the medium and long term.

Useful links and resources

Platform 51's website: www.platform51.org

www.tax-effective-giving.org.uk

www.institute-of-fundraising.org.uk

www.mediatrust.org

www.cafonline.org

Foundation for Social Improvement: <http://www.thefsi.org/>