

Priority Marketing – A Life Without Limbs, From Homeless to Hopeful – Division A – Category 12A (Other)

Research/Situation Analysis: From homeless to hopeful: Born without arms or legs, James Fox navigates by skateboard. By chance of fate, Dan Creighton, founder and CEO of Creighton Construction & Development in Fort Myers, had the opportunity to meet James more than four years ago when he saw him skateboarding and offered him a ride home. That brief interaction left a tremendous impact on Dan, who told all of his family friends and colleagues about this special young man. Even though James was homeless at the time, his positive outlook on life was remarkable. He has overcome numerous hardships and heartaches throughout his childhood and young adult years, yet he continues to live with joy and gratitude, spreading a message of positivity to all he meets. A couple years went by and then one day – driving a route he normally doesn't take – Dan saw James at a bus stop and offered him another ride. The two became fast friends, and over the years, James became part of Dan's family. Sadly, people born with disabilities do not necessarily qualify for financial support. Living a life without arms or legs presents tremendous financial challenges, and Dan wanted to ensure his friend had what he needed to survive. He provided the funds to purchase a new condo for James, but wanted to take it even further by rallying his friends and colleagues to welcome James to his new house and help with the expenses of living to provide James longevity in his new home. In order to create a compelling case for support, Dan Creighton leveraged its existing partnership with Priority Marketing to raise awareness of James' story. Informal secondary research of best practices in the fundraising industry show that delivering an emotionally compelling story that connects the audience to the cause most often results in strong donations. The strategy was to develop and execute a fundraising campaign and event for James that would highlight his and Dan's heartwarming story and demonstrate the importance of the community coming together in support of this young man. Target audiences included affluent members of the Southwest Florida community, Creighton Construction & Development employees, Creighton's network of business partners and local media. **Objectives:** 1) Attract 30 guests/potential donors to the event on Jan. 24, 2020. 2) Use compelling storytelling to secure "\$2,020 for 2020" in donations for James during his fundraising event on Jan. 24. 3) Increase awareness of James' story and encourage the community to give through earned coverage in at least three media outlets within a week of the Jan. 24 event. **Planning:** Planning began on Jan. 13, 2020, when the date for the event was officially set for Jan. 24, 2020. Priority Marketing worked closely with Dan to develop a vision for the fundraising campaign and event and conducted a site visit of the condo on Jan. 14. Priority Marketing also met with the condo association on Jan. 15 to discuss potential venue options and the association's regulations for on-property events. Final planning meetings were conducted via phone in the days leading up to the event.

Implementation: With less than two weeks before the event, Priority Marketing quickly jumped into the planning and execution of an intimate fundraising event with the goal of inspiring the community's generosity in order to provide James with funds to support his day-to-day needs and turn his new house into a home. Priority Marketing interviewed Dan and James and created a GoFundMe account with a compelling description to share James and Dan's inspirational story and highlight James' need for support. The GoFundMe was linked to a special webpage for the event through the Creighton website, which included a brief description on the event and facilitated RSVPs. Priority Marketing also developed an Amazon Wish List, which was linked within the GoFundMe description, to encourage supporters to contribute items such as bedding, bathroom supplies, a coffee table, and a number of voice-activated smart devices that allow James to operate light switches, door locks and curtains with ease. Priority Marketing used multiple channels to communicate with the target audiences, including an invitation email to 140+ invitees via MailChimp in advance of the event, supplemented by direct outreach from Dan given the short notice before the event. The venue presented a hurdle during the planning process, as the

condo association of James' new home was hesitant to allow large parties onsite and offered very limited parking – only six guest parking spots. While the condominium offered a community clubhouse for events, a fee was required for clubhouse use and still presented obstacles for parking and flow to James' condo. The condo is across the street from Word of Life Church, where James is employed as an IT tech, and the church graciously allowed the use of their space at no charge, providing a venue for guests to gather to hear Dan and James' story. Canterbury School provided the use of their bus to shuttle guests from the church to James' condo, solving the limited parking issue. Guests were shuttled to the condo and gathered at the entrance to greet James with a big “welcome home!” Inside, James was met with dozens of gifts supporters had contributed through the Amazon Wish List. Guests had the opportunity to tour the home and enjoy light refreshments. To encourage donations, signs were placed throughout the home highlighting James' greatest areas of need where guests could contribute to the costs of daily living, including HOA fees and utilities, and supply other needed home items. James and Dan's incredible story of friendship captured the interest of media across the state. The News-Press' story of Dan and James and the fundraising efforts was featured on the cover page of its Jan. 27, 2020 edition, and also shared by at least 23 other media outlets throughout the state, including Naples Daily News, Bonita Banner, TC Palm, Palm Beach Post, Ocala Star Banner, Jacksonville, Gainesville Sun, among others. In addition to inviting local media to attend the event, Priority Marketing utilized video and photos from the event in pitching stories to media following the event, resulting in additional features. Local news station ABC-7 also showcased the story in its Positively SWFL segment, which shares heartwarming community stories. NBC-2 will also be airing a special Story2Share feature on the duo highlighting their friendship and message of hope, which was slated to run March 9 – six weeks after the housewarming event. Priority Marketing produced a social media video of the welcome home event, which was shared on Creighton's Facebook and LinkedIn pages, generating over 2,530 views total and counting. Additional social media content was shared on Creighton's social pages surrounding the event, generating a total reach of over 4,000. Considering Creighton's very niche industry following of only 174 followers, the reach greatly exceeded their standard numbers with an average Facebook reach of 345 for the month of January, which more than doubled its average monthly reach of 141. The compelling story took social media by storm. On Facebook, the GoFundMe link was directly shared 389 times, The News-Press story was shared 485 times and the ABC-7 story was shared 288 times, generating hundreds of comments and thousands of reactions, and even shares by notable influencers such as Senator Marco Rubio. **Evaluation:** The fundraising campaign and event far exceeded initial expectations. 1) More than 60 guests attended the fundraising event on Jan. 24, surpassing the attendance goal of 30 people by 100 percent. 2) By the end of the event on Jan. 24, donors had contributed a total of more than \$10,900 in direct donations and GoFundMe donations, exceeding the goal of \$2,020 by 440 percent. Today, approximately \$25,000 has been donated through GoFundMe and by direct donations for James – more than 10 times the original fundraising goal. Additionally, dozens of home items and voice-activated devices were purchased for James through an Amazon Wish List to help make his daily activities easier. Gifts are continuing to be purchased from this list. 3) Within only five days of the event, from Jan. 25-29, 2020, the total estimated reach of the story had climbed to 6,103,854, with stories shared from at least 25 media outlets. The GoFundMe link was shared in these media features, which directly helped drive 140 views to the Creighton website that houses the GoFundMe page, constituting 18 percent of the website's 747 total page views. **Budget:** In under two weeks, Priority Marketing spent 83.72 hours totaling \$10,387.15 (avg. \$135/hour) to execute the planning, marketing, execution and media relations surrounding the fundraising event, **which was all provided pro bono.** Hard costs totaling \$859.83 were covered by Dan Creighton including a tent, decorations, light refreshments for guests and groceries for James.