

# THINKINC.<sup>TM</sup> STRATEGY

## THINKINC. Strategies Create Momentum for Youth Employment Programs

January-June 2017

### *A Story of Two Clients: Alternative Schools Network and UIC Great Cities Institute*

#### **Situation Analysis**

Alternative Schools Network (ASN) has long identified the connection between employment programs for young people and their success in finishing high school, finding work with a living wage, moving forward to college and playing a positive role in their home communities especially around public safety. But funding for those programs has been trending downward, even as the job market has been slow to rebound from the devastating effects of the past decade's Great Recession.

Battling against that trend, ASN has commissioned a series of reports over the past 15 years to document the plight of young people in the Chicago region's most stressed communities. Thinkinc. has been tasked with developing and helping to implement a strategy to address these problems by building the political will for a concerted effort to create and expand youth employment programs.

#### **Deliverables**

So far in 2017 there have been two reports conducted by the University of Illinois at Chicago Great Cities Institute (GCI), one that highlighted the relationship between youth joblessness and violent crime in Chicago neighborhoods and a second that zeroed in on the high cost to taxpayers of underfunding youth employment programs and leaving young people isolated in neighborhoods with few job opportunities. Those reports and the problems they documented were the basis for three events:

- **Youth Hearing:** A youth employment hearing, ***More Jobs, Less Violence – Connecting Youth to a Brighter Future***, at the Chicago Urban League on Monday, January 30, 2017, where ASN released a new GCI report, *“Abandoned in their Neighborhoods: Youth Joblessness Amidst the Flight of Industry and Opportunity.”*
- **Cook County/Chicago Joint Hearing:** A joint hearing of the Chicago City Council Workforce & Audit Committee and the Cook County Workforce, Housing and Community Development Committee, dug into the problems faced by young people looking for jobs in Chicago and Cook County.

- **Report release:** A news conference featuring U.S. Sen. Dick Durbin and U.S. Rep. Robin Kelly, to release the second GCI report: ***The High Costs for Abandoned Youth in Chicago and Cook County.***

In each case Thinkinc. played an instrumental role in framing the reports to focus on the strategic thrust, planning the event, using our connections to help bring in high-profile participants, preparing the participants and helping to shape their remarks. To differentiate the messaging from previous similar hearings and reports and position the current events, in order to generate media interest, Thinkinc. conducted a review of recent jobs reports and media coverage.

Durbin, U.S. Reps. Jan Schakowsky and Robin Kelly, Cook County Board President Toni Preckwinkle, Cook County Commissioners Jesus “Chuy” Garcia, Bridget Gainer and Richard Boykin, Chicago Deputy Mayor Andrea Zopp and Alderman Bernard Hanson all participated in at least one of these events.

Thinkinc. initially worked with ASN and GCI to shape the key questions for the reports, framing the message and identifying what would be intrinsically news worthy, to raise the profile of the issues laid out in the reports.

Thinkinc. developed the media strategy for each of the report releases as well as the hearing, getting the reports to key reporters in advance but embargoing the release until the day of the events and in general pitching targeted media outlets to ensure that key audiences were aware of the report. Thinkinc. drafted media alerts to announce the events and report releases, then drafted and finalized news releases for the hearing including the key findings and recommendations of the reports. For the January hearing, we developed a second news release highlighting national key findings that was sent to national media. Thinkinc. also prepared a fact sheet for the first report that highlighted key findings, and provided administrative assistance to prepare all materials for release including formatting, proofreading and distribution to media.

Thinkinc. prepared a comprehensive list of media contacts using Muck Rack that included education, business, youth, public safety, criminal justice beat reporters and writers for traditional and social media from regional and national publications. Thinkinc. coordinated the distribution of the media alerts and news releases through Constant Contact to the customized media list.

Thinkinc. conducted media relations ahead of the hearings to pitch media on covering the teen joblessness issues. Laurie Glenn was onsite at the hearings to coordinate media relations activities and conducted follow-up conversations with media afterwards.

### ***Extensive Media Coverage***

In January Crain’s Chicago Business, the Chicago Tribune, the Chicago Sun-Times and other news outlets had a number of news articles and columns that flowed from our work and the related events. Three radio stations and seven television channels had stories. There were online articles on the Chicagoist, PR Newswire, ABC 7, CBS Chicago and the Chicago Crusader. The calculated publicity value was more than \$104,000.

For the June news conference on the release of the countywide report, from June 12-13, television news reports about the event drew a Nielsen audience of 578,477 on ABC-7 Chicago, Fox-32, WCIU, WGN-TV and CLTV, as well as a Nielsen radio audience of 284,700 on WBBM-AM, WBEZ-FM and WGN-AM. Combined, the television and radio exposure had a calculated publicity value of \$110,826 over a 36-hour period, according to media analysis by Metro Monitor. Prominent print and online coverage also appeared in a [Chicago Tribune column](#), a [Tribune business story](#), and articles in the [Chicago Sun-Times](#) and [Crain's Chicago Business](#).

By providing advance copies but embargoing the publishing of news about the report and news conference, we gave reporters a head start to write their articles so that several prominent mentions occurred on the day of the news conference, extending the story's reach, resonance and effectiveness.

How did Thinkinc. repeat its media successes just five months later despite working with a similar report? We went beyond the report's executive summary to find a news hook: That cash-strapped Illinois and the federal government were losing billions of future tax revenues because youth who were out of school and without a high school diploma struggled with joblessness. We highlighted the distances between where Cook County jobs were and where jobless youth lived. Media seized on these new angles, helping us advance the story.

These angles also gave the elected officials we worked with a way to discuss jobs legislation that they had introduced or had backed, creating further media interest. Thinking strategically, Thinkinc. produced another win-win-win: Our clients -- ASN and GCI -- won with an overwhelming number of hits and high-quality media attention; elected officials with whom we coordinated won by having a platform to promote their actions on behalf of constituents; and media won with news that interests the communities that they serve.