Choosing a Platform and Increasing Fundraising Efforts for Orran

Choosing a Platform and Increasing Fundraising

Efforts for Orran

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cooperation with Orran. This report represents the work of one or more WPI undergraduate

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Abstract

Orran is dedicated to helping children living in poverty in Armenia. Our goal was to find a virtual platform to connect sponsors at Orran with the children they sponsor. Additionally, our goal was to provide recommendations on fundraising strategies to Orran. We conducted interviews to learn about Orran, chose Patreon as the platform to use, and discovered fundraising strategies. We created a Patreon manual and some recommendations for Orran to increase their donations. We aimed to bring more attention to Orran.

Acknowledgments

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When working through this project, each section was evenly split for drafting the sections. Within a section, Allen, Cole, and Massari took a third of the work by separating distinct categories. For example, multiple sections were broken up into three objectives and each member took an objective to draft. Each person also reviewed and edited all sections written.

Executive Summary

Poverty negatively impacts a child's ability to learn and develop, which in turn leads to these children facing many barriers when trying to leave the poor community in which they grew up. These children spend their days begging in the street to raise money for their family's essential needs.

The country is frequently involved in conflict with surrounding nations. The substantial amount of conflict has led to the large poor population. Most of the conflict has been caused by disputes over territory which has negatively impacted Armenia's economy. The dissolution of the USSR accelerated the depth of violence within these conflicts.

The USSR's dissolution also led to the creation of many community-based programs to assist with the poverty in Armenia. Most people are familiar with social programs that have been beneficial to either themselves or those around them. An organization such as the Boys and Girls Club of America is a social program that caters to underprivileged children in America and has had a large presence in the culture of metropolitan and suburban neighborhoods. This is the same case in Yerevan. After the dissolution of the USSR in the early 1990's, the new governing body in Armenia implemented many community projects to help with the economic issues left behind by the Soviets. These programs became popular and eventually led to services being started by members of the community rather than from a federal level. Children living below the poverty line use programs such as Orran to help support themselves and their families when they are struggling.

To help this situation, a nonprofit organization called Orran has worked to provide support to many of these children. Ultimately, the goal is to get the children off the streets and into educational programs that prepare them for the future through vocational workshops and apprenticeship programs. Orran offers people the opportunity to sponsor a child, where all donations from a sponsor go directly towards aiding the child, whether it be their meals, medical cost, tutoring, activities, or clothing. Unfortunately, due to COVID-19, it has become more challenging for people around the world to travel, especially out of the country. Many sponsors and potential sponsors are international and therefore cannot visit Orran and directly see the impacts of their donations. This has influenced the ability of donors to form connections with the children they sponsor, which Orran has stated is important to them.

Orran is dedicated to eliminating the concept of child begging within Armenia, providing support to the needy, and giving guidance and training to help the children establish a foundation for adulthood through cooking, technology, and other life skills classes. The organization began by helping only a small group of children. Today, however, they are well recognized and have helped thousands. Orran wouldn't be where it is today without the help of its donors and sponsors. As a result of the kindness of others, today Orran has 300 children it is helping with its facilities (Orran, n.d.). To continue helping these children, Orran needs more donations and sponsors for the children, which has been a challenge for them to this day. Orran has asked us to design a platform for the sponsors and children to use, under the supervision of Orran staff and volunteers. They want a way for the sponsors to learn more about the children, to digitally

interact with them, and to see the support the children receive from Orran. The hope with this is that this will lead to more donations and sponsors joining down the line.

Our goal was to recommend and potentially design a system for Orran in hopes to increase donor retention and create stable donations for the organization through connections to the children. The presence of COVID-19 has put a strain on the donation process that usually involves more in-person interactions. By creating a platform that allows for similar interactions to happen safely and virtually, we can increase donations for the children and expand the program itself.

The main objectives for this project were to understand Orran's program as well as similar programs, to understand how the children benefit from the program and learn the technical capabilities of the Orran volunteers and staff members, and to find a platform that best suits Orran. The methods we used to address these objectives are unstructured interviews, surveys, and structured interviews. Unstructured interviews were done with some of the staff at Orran, people from an organization similar to Orran: the Boys and Girls Club of America, and several members of the WPI community with relevant backgrounds. This was done to learn more about the programs offered to children facing poverty and to learn about possible tools used in the past to attract donors.

The platform we chose was Patreon. Interviews were also done with some of the staff at Orran with the help of students from the Armenian University of Armenia (AUA). Surveys were sent out to members of the community to comment on a test Patreon we created to give to Orran as a reference. These comments were to see how we could adjust the Patreon before showing it to Orran. Structured interviews were done with WPI's librarians, professors, members of the Global lab, and individuals with basic web design skills and computer science backgrounds. This was done to learn the best practices in maintaining the Patreon for Orran. All of these methods gave us the tools to find a successful platform and give fundraising recommendations to Orran.

Introduction

Poverty negatively impacts a child's ability to learn and develop, which in turn leads to children facing many barriers when trying to move out of the poor communities in which they grew up (Ferrone & Chzhen, 2016). They face an education deficit due to a focus on financially supporting their family and are more likely to continue living in poverty in the future, in part due to their education deficit.

The dissolution of the Soviet Union in the early 1990's caused Armenian economic and political structures to be completely reworked. A push for democracy caused the new government structure to implement Community Driven Development (CDD) projects that would help combat growing issues of poverty and community mistrust. Armenian culture had historically been built upon a large amount of interpersonal trust within its members, but this ideology had been crushed by the presence of the USSR (Babajanian, 2008). CDD projects require the use of "social capital" and rely quite heavily on the participation of community members. The bottom-up approach CDD projects take, where the work starts at a neighborhood level, does not take into account the change in Armenian culture due to being a part of the Soviet Union for 70 years (One World Nations Online, *n.d.)*. These federally funded programs failed to work against the "Soviet mentality", a lingering reliance on the state and distrust of their neighbors that had been inculcated in the general population. The government believed that community participation would be high in these projects, but that was not the case. People with intimate knowledge of the needs and wants of the public needed to be the ones to help build up the community again. Orran is an example of this community led rebuilding that is a beneficial part to fighting against the onset of poverty in local neighborhoods.

Orran is a nonprofit organization that has worked to provide care to many children, especially in Yerevan, Armenia, and has supported their families financially through providing aid to the children. The organization offers donors the opportunity to sponsor a child for a year, allowing them to pay for the child's food, clothes, education, medical expenses, and more. Unfortunately, due to COVID-19 travel has become more challenging for the world. The founders of Orran would like sponsors to connect with the children at the center, but the pandemic has affected international donors' ability to travel to Yerevan. Orran has helped thousands of children in Yerevan living in poverty (Orran, n.d. -b). Orran wants a way for the sponsors to interact with the center virtually and see the impact their donations have on the children, to encourage more or repeat donations.

To continue making an impact, Orran needs more stable donations to the center and sponsors to annually renew their pledges to the children. An individual can sponsor a child for one year. However, after that period ends, the child still needs financial support. We have been asked to design a platform for the sponsors and children to connect virtually. The objectives for the project are to review Orran's program and similar programs' fundraising; to determine children's long-term benefits from program and Orran's volunteer and staff's internet capabilities; and to identify the best platform for Orran to use and develop fundraising strategies. We interviewed some of the volunteers at Orran and staff from a similar organization to Orran,

the Boys and Girls Club of America (BGCA). Structured interviews will be done with a Worcester Polytechnic Institute (WPI)'s librarian and a professor of computer science.

We began our research into the history of poverty and conflict in Armenia. The country is frequently involved in conflict with surrounding nations, helping to lead to Armenia's large poor population. Most of the conflict has been caused by disputes over territory, and the fall of the USSR accelerated the depth of violence. These disputes and conflict with neighboring countries have negatively impacted Armenia's economy.

Literature Review

Armenia is a country neighboring Turkey, Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Iran. It has mainly mountainous terrain as well as pastures and forests (One World Nations Online, n.d.). The country has both urban areas such as the capital, Yerevan, and rural areas. The country has struggled with poverty in the past, and even after many economic reforms there are still a significant number of people living below the poverty line in Armenia (International Monetary Fund, 2003). A majority of the poor population in Armenia consists of children, women, the rural population, and the elderly.

A main cause behind the poverty in the 1990s was the dissolution of the USSR, of which Armenia was a part. The dissolution of the USSR in 1991 caused inflation rates to rise for everyone, including the Armenian population (Odling-Smee 2001). This led to a severe lack of infrastructure, causing the need for many economic reforms, which were still needed even a decade later (International Monetary Fund, 2003). Additionally, in 1988 there was a massive earthquake in northern Armenia that destroyed much of the area and caused many to emigrate due to the destruction (Marzpanyan 2015). This hindered the economy in Armenia (International Monetary Fund, 2003). A lack of trade with its neighboring countries due to political tensions has contributed to poverty as metals and precious stones are a main export of Armenia (International Monetary Fund, 2003).

Armenia is a frequent hub of conflict and persecution by surrounding nations. War can have lasting effects on the countries where conflict occurred as well as on the people involved; one of these effects is poverty. Within the last century the Armenian people have faced extreme, existential struggles. From 1894 to 1896, a period named the Hamidian Massacre, an estimated 300,000 Armenians were killed (Brandes, 2020). In addition, the Armenian Genocide occurred from 1915 to approximately 1922 and the Armenian people are still suffering from its impacts, including a significant reduction in the size of their nation. The relationship between Turkey and Armenia is tense to this day (International Monetary Fund, 2003). These poor relations have negatively impacted the Armenian economy. Additionally, children in Armenia suffered tremendously as a result of the Genocide. During the Genocide, children were often seen as property rather than people and many were sold or kidnapped (Watenpaugh, 2013).

Their next major discord, the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, started in 1988 over territorial disputes with Azerbaijan and was only fueled by the dissolution of the USSR (International Crisis Group, 2022). Many Armenians were also forced to flee from their homes to avoid the dangers of the war (Armenian Bar Association, 2020). As of 2020, Azerbaijan has gained control of the bulk of territory previously belonging to Nagorno-Karabakh during the war (International Crisis Group, 2022).

The Armenian population has been negatively impacted due to fighting and damage caused by the historical conflicts themselves. There is a population of children in Armenia that are either poor or deprived in some way. A 2016 study conducted by the United Nations estimated that 64% of Armenian children who are younger than 17 years of age are deprived in some way, 36% of children are poor, and 3% are extremely poor (Ferrone & Chzhen, 2016). In

comparison to the United States, in 2019 the child poverty rate was approximately 12.5% (Haider 2021). The United Nations defines extreme poverty as living on less than $1.90 per day (Frykholm 2016). Because many families are struggling for money, they often rely on their children to earn money in order to make sure ends meet. Child labor is not uncommon in regions of Armenia, and neither are child beggars (Bureau of International Labor Affairs, 2020). Begging on the streets is dangerous for the children as it can keep them from school, healthcare, and can hinder their development, making it one of the worst forms of child labor (Human Rights Defender of The Republic of Armenia 2018).

Poverty in Armenia is a vicious cycle centering on health and education. Those living in poverty are more susceptible to declining health and increased disease because they have less accessibility to medical attention. Education also plays a vital role in economic status due to its ability to help people get better paying jobs. A family having wealth and education can support and inspire their children to pursue their aspirations in life and allow them the space to achieve their goals. The number of children within a household can affect a family's proneness to poverty due to the increase in necessary costs and time that must be devoted to the children.

A research study in Armenia looked at multiple dimensions of a child's life and how those areas impact a child's development. These dimensions are defined as: Nutrition, Early Childhood Education and Care, Education, Leisure, Social Interactions, Clothing, Information, Utilities, and Housing (Ferrone & Chzhen, 2016). In Armenia, 88% of children are deprived in at least one dimension, and this rate increases in rural areas to 97% (Ferrone & Chzhen, 2016). The study done by Ferrone and Chzhen used "national estimates of multidimensional child poverty in Armenia, measured using UNICEF's Multiple Overlapping Deprivation Analysis methodology" (Ferrone & Chzhen, 2016) to analyze three different age groups and understand the different percentages of deprivation. The three age groups are 0-5 years old, 6-14 years old, and 15-17 years old. When data from the individual age groups were collectively observed, the findings showed the highest deprivation rates were in leisure (51.8%), utilities (50.7%), and housing (48.7%). Social relations (43.4%) and information given to children (43%) followed close behind. Following the data, the study uses the information they found to create a list of social protections in Armenia. It is thought that these social protections in Armenia are underutilized by poor families.

Social Protection programs can be considered either direct cash benefits or programs that assist individuals and families in need. In comparison to the source used in the previous paragraph, a study completed in Armenia with data from 2001 found 77% of the eligible population utilized the Basic Benefit Package (BBP). The eligible population was formed by individuals who registered for BBP. The pool consisted of 3,316 people. 2,422 utilized the BBP and 714 did not, although they were eligible for the program. (Angel-Urdinola & Jain, 2006).

To demonstrate social protection programs, we will discuss the participation process and impact of sponsor participation in two different social programs, Oportunidades in Mexico and the Boys and Girls Club of America (BGCA). Oportunidades is a government-funded "conditional cash transfer program" that provides services in career and education development

(World Bank, 2014). The BGCA is a national youth non-profit organization that aims to provide services in education, career development, athletic, and substance abuse prevention programs (Anderson-Butcher, 2003). Orran's model is more similar to the BGCA, but Armenia and Mexico are scored much closer on the Human Development Index (HDI), 81 and 74 respectively, so they have more similar economic landscapes in terms of poverty (United Nations Development Programme, n.d.). The Human Index Model averages the statistics of a country's citizens based on lifespan, education levels, and standard of living and then creates a list that ranks a country's development based on these items (United Nations Development Programme, n.d.). Studies by both Anderson-Butcher, Newsom, and Ferrari (co-authors of the journal article *Participation in Boys and Girls Club and Relationships to Youth Outcomes*), and Coady, Martellini, and Parker (co-authors of the journal article *Information and Participation in Social Programs*) either arrived at the conclusion, or have made the assumption based on earlier findings, that the use of social programs is beneficial to children's development and overall well-being, with Anderson-Butcher, Newsome, and Ferrari concluding their study with the statement, "the importance of youth development organizations such as the BCGA as contexts for positive development should not be underestimated". The article detailing participation in the BCGA goes much deeper into the impact of their specific programs. Surveying 120 children from across the U.S.A. Some sample findings were that regular club attendance had a positive relation to "self-reported grades, enjoyment of school, and effort in school" as well as a negative relation towards wanting to cheat in school (Anderson-Butcher, 2003). The authors of the article discussing Oportunidades had made a general assumption that lined up with the previous articles concluding remarks, but their research was much more centered on the participation process and what factors go into participants making a decision about attending a social program. Their findings concluded that "the information stage is the major source of variation in participation." (Coady, 2013) This has large implications for our project. As we curated a better platform or design for a platform to link sponsors with a child we were directly impacting how information will be available to those who want to donate as well as those who are looking to donate to Orran. Our goal was to recommend and potentially design a system for Orran in hopes to increase donor retention and create stable donations for the organization through connections to the children. The improvement in Coady's identified "information stage" means that we should increase participation and interest in donors' aid and families joining Orran. By securing more donors, Orran will have the means to support a large number of children.

   Orran is an organization in Yerevan, Armenia with whom we are working. Created in 2000 by Armine and Raffi Hovannisian, Orran's mission is to "...divert vulnerable children from the streets and engage them in academic, cultural, and extracurricular activities, fight the concept of beggar children as the principal breadwinners of their families, identify and develop vulnerable children's interests and talents toward a working career, help families 'in crisis', assist the lonely and needy elderly, and prevent the spread of destitution and begging among Armenia's children and elderly" (Orran, n.d. -a). Orran has grown from a small organization to becoming internationally known and helping children, families, and the needy with the help of donors and

volunteers (Orran, n.d -a). Currently, Orran has 300 children being helped. Besides the goals of significantly reducing the number of child beggars, Orran also aims to increase both the number of donors and donation amounts to the organization as it is challenging to raise money to help so many in need. Orran has three main methods for donations and support: anyone interested in helping can donate online, create a pledge, and even sponsor a child.

Sponsoring a child allows an individual to form a one-on-one connection with a child and to donate money to just the child they're sponsoring. The more money donated, the more of the child's resources are paid for (Orran n.d. -b). These resources include food, medical service, clothing, tutoring, and training for trade and worker skills (Orran, n.d. -a). However, the overall concept of sponsoring a child in nonprofit settings has been looked down upon in general by some as it can be seen as being disrespectful to the child and is simply a marketing technique for the organization (Mittelman & Neilson 2009). To create more ethical child sponsorships, many look to rights-based approach (RBA) sponsorships (Noh, 2019). RBA sponsorships are based more on the concepts of participation, being linked to human rights, preventing discrimination, and overall accountability (Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2006). The child being sponsored should be the overall priority, not the marketing of the child (Noh, 2019). The child should be empowered, not pitied. Some organizations have adopted the RBA approach to child sponsorship including ActionAid, which demonstrated the potential of RBA to create an ethical approach to child sponsorship while still continuing to bring in donations to said child (Noh, 2019). Sponsorships should be a balance between ethics and marketing, as the ethical side protects the child, and the marketing side earns donations for the child. Information about RBA will be shared with Orran to guide them when using the Patreon. We shared a case study called Human Rights-Based Child Sponsorship: A Case Study of ActionAid, (Noh, 2019) with Orran as a guide for the RBA.

It is important to Orran that donors see how their donations are affecting the children's lives. To do this, Orran wants to make it possible for people to virtually connect with the children they're sponsoring. By allowing donors to learn more about the children at Orran and see their donation's impact, Orran can likely gain more publicity, leading to more donations and sponsors for children. Normally, sponsors would be able to visit Orran to meet the children and form connections with them. At this moment however, the organization doesn't have an effective way to do this remotely due to COVID-19.

As the goal of this project was to recommend and potentially design a system for Orran in hopes to increase donor retention and create stable donations for the organization through connections to the children, it is important to promote them in an ethical way. Since children are a vulnerable population, special precautions need to be kept in mind when collecting data from them. This project will not only benefit Orran's children, but the families of the children, potential sponsors, volunteers of Orran, and will spread word of Orran and their goals. Orran would receive more donations, which would mean a better support system for the children. The families of the children will have more resources while they work to support themselves. The

volunteers will gain more resources to help the children, likely making their jobs easier. If more people become sponsors, Orran will be networked more, allowing more donations to come in.

Methodology

Our goal was to recommend and potentially design a system for Orran in hopes to increase donor retention and create stable donations for the organization through connections to the children. We chose a system for Orran to increase donor retention and increase donations to the organization. In regards to the system itself, we made sure the platform was user-friendly for the sponsors as well as the volunteers and staff helping to manage the platform. The three objectives we had to reach our goal were:

- Objective 1: Review Orran's Program and Similar Programs Fundraising
- Objective 2: Determine Children's Long-Term Benefits from Program and Orran's Volunteer and Staff's Technical Capabilities
- Objective 3: Identify the Best Platform for Orran to Use and Develop Fundraising Strategies

Objective 1: Review Orran's Program and Similar Programs Fundraising

Our first objective was to review and learn about Orran's program and see how they fundraise. In addition, we wanted to see how similar programs fundraise to determine the most effective platform possible. We used unstructured interviews to learn more about other programs. Unstructured interviews are an informal form of interviewing where the interviewees are asked questions open to interpretation and have more control over where the interview goes. Interviews are an excellent way to perform research, gain qualitative data, and collect oral histories from people. The questions we asked our interviewees were mostly open questions. Open questions are those open to interpretation and have different answers depending on the person. We wanted to collect a wide range of data initially through interviewing a wide range of people. These allowed us to collect information on Orran's needs and possible improvements to their fundraising strategies. One group with whom we spoke were some of the volunteers and staff members from Orran. This group included Mrs. Armine Hovannisian, a co-founder, Ms. Seza Aslanian, the director of programs, a teacher and a university volunteer. These are the people who work directly on site and likely interact with the children themselves on a regular basis. They understand the children and how donations benefit their experiences at Orran, and more specifically what is needed for each child. By further assessing the needs of the children, we expressed the situational context better in the platform choice and Orran's web page design.

We also spoke with a member of an organization similar to Orran, the BGCA. The BGCA has many similar incentives and programs as Orran; they have also helped a multitude of children. We spoke with Ms. Ashleigh St. Peter, the Program Director at the Waltham, Massachusetts BGCA. By speaking with a similar organization, we learned potential tactics used for fundraising and sponsoring children, and how successful the tactics were. All those we interviewed were informed of who we were and what we were doing with the information we collected from them. We also asked whether or not we could use their names in our report. This was done for both structured and unstructured interviews. Along with a member of the

Massachusetts BGCA we conducted more unstructured interviews with employees of the WPI Division of University Advancement and the Office of Integrated Funding Advancement at WPI. These groups on campus, while working with an older demographic than Orran, have much experience in working on fundraising with college students who are also a vulnerable population.

From there we analyzed all the data collected from the interviews and chose the most relevant information for our project. The selection of information was performed through weeding out unrelated information and identifying actionable items from the interviews. The relevance of information was determined based on if it could benefit Orran's marketing and fundraising efforts. Completing this objective led to us choosing a high quality platform design that meets the basic standards of all people involved in Orran.

Objective 2: Determine Children's Long-Term Benefits from Program and Orran's Volunteer and Staff's Technical Capabilities

Our second objective was to understand how the children benefit from the program at Orran and the volunteer's technical capabilities. A more specific aspect we planned to learn was the volunteer's ability to create a post or upload content to a webpage. We chose to use unstructured interviews to obtain this information. The children are considered a vulnerable population, therefore, surveying the volunteers is an easier way to collect data for our project. We interviewed both a university volunteer and a teacher with help from two AUA students who were interested in working on this project with us. We provided the AUA students with the type of information we hoped to get from the interviews and sample questions.

In the initial steps of this project, we planned to conduct surveys on the children at Orran. After meeting with our sponsor, we recognized the hurdles in communicating with the children and gaining consent from the children's parents. We collaborated with the two students from the American University of Armenia (AUA) and came to a mutual decision to not survey the children but instead survey or interview the volunteers at Orran, the AUA students were capable of going to the physical location of Orran while knowing the language better.

We hoped to gain information from the unstructured interviews with the volunteers about the children's experiences with Orran. The responses allowed us to gain a better understanding of the importance of Orran and provided stories we can use in promoting the sponsoring of a child program. We can use the responses on Orran's website on the page linked to the Patreon. This will attract potential sponsors to donate.

We interviewed some of the volunteers at Orran with the help of students from the American University of Armenia (AUA) to learn their technical capabilities. They will be monitoring the children so we wanted to make sure they have technical capabilities to help the children.

Objective 3: Identify the Best Platform for Orran to Use and Develop Fundraising Strategies

Our final objective was to understand what goes into choosing a platform, along with potential fundraising strategies. The platform should be user friendly and low maintenance to make it easier for the volunteers, staff, and the sponsors to use. Social media outlets such as Facebook and Instagram are used to help market Orran's programs and the support that they provide to the children. While we also encouraged Orran to modify their social media usage to increase donor numbers, Orran was aiming for something that allows more of a one-on-one experience between sponsors and children, while also maintaining privacy for the child. This privacy and online safety would be handled by the volunteers and staff, who would manage the content on Orran's platform. This will lead to more general connections to the organization. The first method we used during this objective were structured interviews. We interviewed the WPI librarian Paige Neumann, Computer Science Professor Lane Harrison, and faculty and staff at the WPI Advancement Office to help with platform choice, Orran's web design suggestions, and social media usage. We wanted to identify the best way to maximize the marketability of Orran's program. More specifically, the most effective methods for presenting information, retaining donors, and making the service user friendly for both the sponsors and the volunteers and children who will be updating the posts on the Patreon.

From the information collected, we moved into the process of creating the platform. We decided to use the platform Patreon as it is a well-known and relatively easy platform to use. The Patreon platform allows donors to pay for different tiers that give them different benefits (Patreon n.d.). The more money paid, the more benefits the donor gets. This way, all of the donations from the sponsors would go directly to the children, not towards maintaining the Patreon itself. Before the final deliverable is to be launched for Orran, we conducted a controlled experiment where a model Patreon was released and a sample group from the WPI community was selected to test out the site. From this we gained feedback relating to user experience that was used to update the Patreon to improve usability.

Results

Data collected were based on the methods used for our three objectives:

- Objective 1: Review Orran's Program and Similar Programs Fundraising
- Objective 2: Determine Children's Long-Term Benefits from Program and Orran's Volunteer's Technical Capabilities
- Objective 3: Identify the Best Platform for Orran to Use and Develop Fundraising Strategies

Objective 1: Review Orran's Program and Similar Programs Fundraising

We conducted five unstructured interviews with a member of the BGCA, employees of the WPI Division of University Advancement, and the Office of Integrated Funding Advancement at WPI. Through these interviews we determined that the largest theme of fundraising is showing donors how an organization has impacted the life of the people that they support and how their donation has made a difference in the organization. The first piece of this theme is mainly done through testimonials. Both staff at the charity organizations and people who they serve tend to give testimonials about their experiences that help donors understand the importance of said program. The second part of the main theme is done in various forms. Mrs. Liz Chirico of the Integrated Fundraising Advancement Office at WPI spoke about the use of impact emails. These emails are sent out to donors with information that details what the money donated is being spent on and how it has positively affected the organization. This same idea was touched upon in our interview with Mrs. Ashleigh St. Peters of the Waltham Boys and Girls Club. Instead of using impact emails, it was their social media posts that illustrated the impact of donations.

Another theme that was demonstrated in our interviews was the process of donor retention. Mr. David Pula and Mrs. Liz Chirico, both from WPI, spoke much on how vital it is for an organization to create a culture of donor retention. Mrs. Liz Chirico talked about giving thanks to donors as a way to make them feel appreciated and likely to donate again, this was achieved through thank you calls and specified appreciation "gifts" based on donation amount (e.g. Donors giving $10,000 would be given a more personalized and extravagant gift than one giving $100.).

We conducted a joint interview with Orran's co-founder, Armine Hovannisian and their Director of Programs, Mrs. Seza Aslanian. This interview gave us insight into Orran's main methods of fundraising. Mrs. Hovannisian spoke about her personal relationship to about "90% of the donors", stating that she knows them by first name. This personal relation also has led to a large donor retention rate and is a main reason for Orran's funding. As a testimony to this, Mrs. Aslanian's family have been donors since the creation of Orran and from this connection Mrs. Aslanian eventually became the Director of Programs of Orran three years ago. Mrs. Hovannisian is also the Director of Junior Achievement Armenia and has used this connection to

help link Orran to a larger organization that creates more visibility for them. Some members of Junior Achievement have become the masters for specific apprenticeship programs that are featured at Orran.

Objective 2: Determine Children's Long-Term Benefits from Program and Orran's volunteer's Technical Capabilities

We recommended the survey or interview included questions regarding the volunteers' technical capabilities along with their social media usage and Patreon knowledge. We gained valuable information about the Orran volunteers' internet capabilities regarding navigating and using the Patreon platform. The AUA students provided an English transcript of their interviews which provided information on the volunteer and teacher's familiarity with social media. Both the volunteer and teacher had common knowledge of Facebook and Instagram; the volunteer said they began using Facebook for their volunteer work with the center. The teacher provided information regarding the children's familiarity with social media and their comfortability with being in photos or videos. After introducing Patreon to both the interviewees, who had previously not heard of the platform, both had positive feedback and believed the children would enjoy using it. The interviews provided small stories of what an average child's day looks like, but did not provide thorough detail that could be useful for a Patreon post.

Objective 3: Identify the Best Platform for Orran to Use and develop fundraising strategies

We conducted two structured interviews to identify the best platform for Orran to use and how to better develop their fundraising strategies. Our interviews were with Ms. Paige Neumann, one of the WPI librarians and with Professor Lane Harrison, a Professor of Computer Science. Our interview with Ms. Paige Neumann was relevant to our research as she has access to lots of resources, both digital and in person, which were helpful for us in our research. Some of these resources included reaching out to some people in WPI's computer science department for more specific platform advice. Ms. Neumann also gave us some basic advice for our platform design. She stated that sometimes less is more when it comes to websites, and to try and keep unnecessary information off of the page as it could distract the user.

Our interview with Professor Harrison was relevant to our research as he has more knowledge of presenting visuals online as a computer science professor. He was also able to give us some advice for using Patreon and suggestions for promoting a platform like this. For the Patreon, he recommended to keep it easy to maintain and that updates made on the page shouldn't be too frequent to overwhelm people or too limited as people could lose interest. Within the Patreon, he suggested keeping the tier cost lower if possible, to entice donors more. Next, he said that social media is a great way to promote a Patreon page and to draw attention to fundraisers. When the Patreon is up and running, he said it may be good to make posts on social media when new Patreon posts are up so people are automatically alerted. These suggestions were made by several of the people who we interviewed.

    The Patreon manual we are creating for Orran contains information to keep the page simple-looking. Additionally, in our recommendations section we will recommend making some changes to Orran.org to make it look simpler to prevent the viewer from becoming overwhelmed. For social media usage, one has the ability to link their social media accounts to the Patreon account, which is a great way to alert people about the program. For being able to see the impacts of donations, testimonials and quotes from the children that were collected using the surveys will be found on the donation section of Orran.org. This will further encourage people to either donate or become a sponsor.

    To test the effectiveness of a Patreon for Orran, we created a model platform with information detailing Orran's mission and sample posts. This model was then distributed to members of the WPI community, who included professors from the WPI Interactive Media and Game Design department, a professor from the WPI Business School, the other students in the WPI Armenia IQP project cohort, Ms. Liz Chirico, Professor Lane Harrison, and the Assistant Vice President of Strategic Donor Outreach at WPI, Ms. Stephanie Pasha. The model images can be seen below:
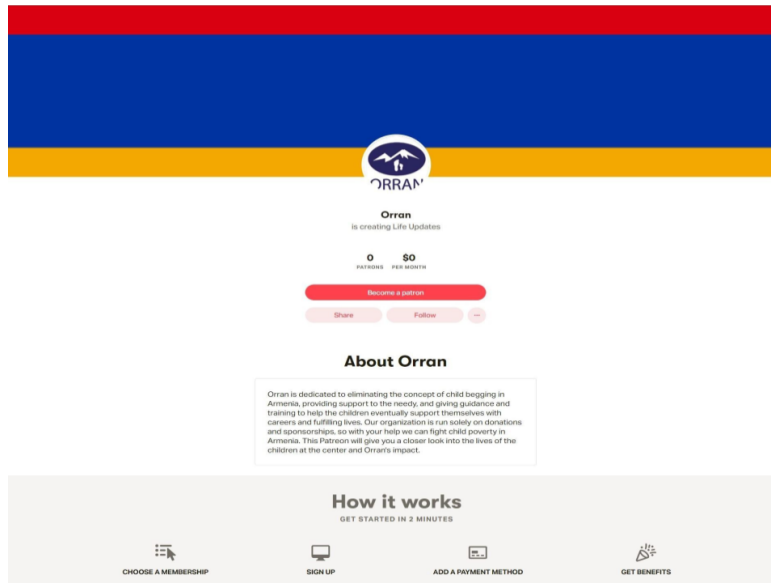

Figure 1: Model Patreon created for feedback.

    A survey was given along with the model to be completed after the test Patreon was looked through. This survey allowed participants to give feedback on our platform. The feedback was separated into three sections: ease of navigation, visual appeal, and emotional appeal. The feedback given is seen in the figures below.

On a scale of 1 to 5 how easy did you find it to navigate our Patreon?
17 responses
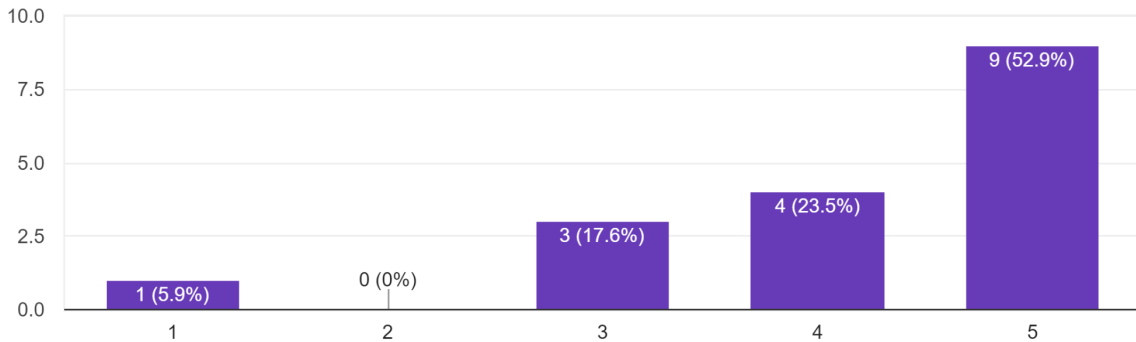
Figure 2: Model Patreon Survey Graph - Ease of Use

The majority of our feedback for the ease of use was positive. A big factor that tended to make participants rate lower than five was the lack of information given. One participant said "The layout is very clean and simple. I was confused by the $0 per month part at the top." Comments like this demonstrate more issues with lack of context on our model than it will to Orran's official Patreon. These issues will be addressed in Orran's Patreon as they will include multiple stories and a tiered system, defined by the center. For the purpose of our survey we made our sample post public and had only one tier that cost no money so that participants did not believe that they needed to pay to complete the survey. In the creation of the official Patreon for Orran they will have customized tiers for donors and more content about the center and the children there. The posts that Orran creates will have short previews, but a donor must become a member of one of the tiers to view the full content. This should enhance user ability since there will be less confusion about paying for content and more content to look through.

On a scale of 1 to 5 how visually appealing did you find our Patreon?
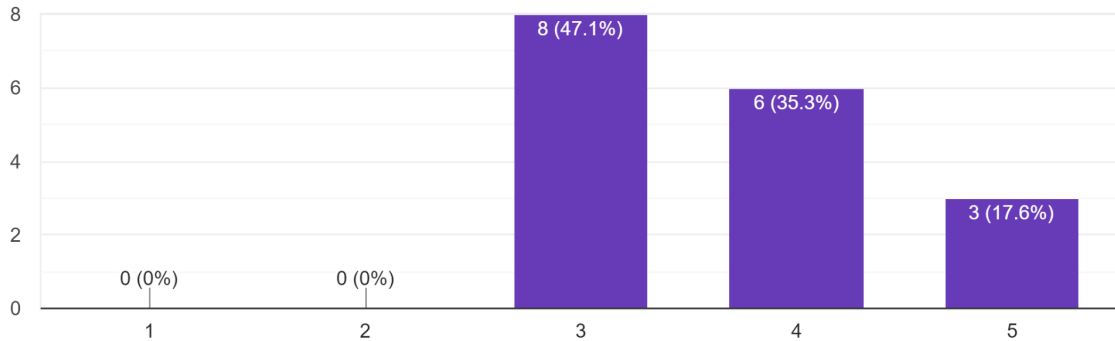17 responses

Figure 3: Model Patreon Survey Graph - Visual Appeal

The response to the visual appeal for our website ranged from average to excellent. Every response given by participants who gave a score of below five said that pictures of the center, the children, and the children's activities there would add to the appeal, for instance one participant stated, "as you're trying to tug at heartstrings, more pictures would be helpful, particularly of the children if you can get permission".

On a scale of 1 to 5 how emotionally appealing did you find the post on our Patreon to be?
17 responses
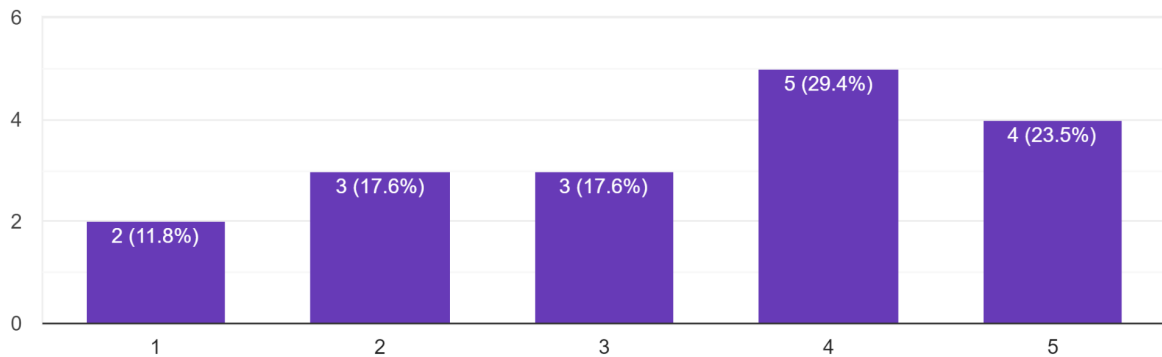
Figure 4: Model Patreon Survey Graph - Emotional Appeal

The responses based on emotional appeal varied widely. Many comments were made on how there was not enough content to create an emotional appeal for users. One specific comment illustrated how they "don't know who the person is" in regards to who Davit, our fictional child,

is and "why they are connected to Orran". These concerns can be addressed by further describing the child and their connection to Orran. Other comments spoke about how the pictures used did not display "the gravity of the situation". The general theme from all the comments was that the sample post does not bring enough emotional context that would be given from real testimonials from the children and staff at Orran.

Based on the feedback we decided to make a few changes. To help with emotional appeal we created a public post that is displayed on the Patreon that details the prevalence of child poverty in Armenia and how Orran is working to combat this issue. This post then leads into how the Patreon donation is used to support this mission. In terms of visual appeal we made the Orran logo slightly smaller and enhanced the resolution. Our newly edited Patreon was then shown to Orran as a template for their Patreon page. They can use as much of the template as they want, or make any desired modifications to their own page. Their Patreon page could be set up in a similar style as the model along with similar content, but the posts would be full of real testimonials directly from the children at Orran. Testimonials would be collected by Orran staff. Their site would also include pictures of the children and actual photographs taken by volunteers and staff instead of stock photos that were used for our model. The updated model can be seen below:
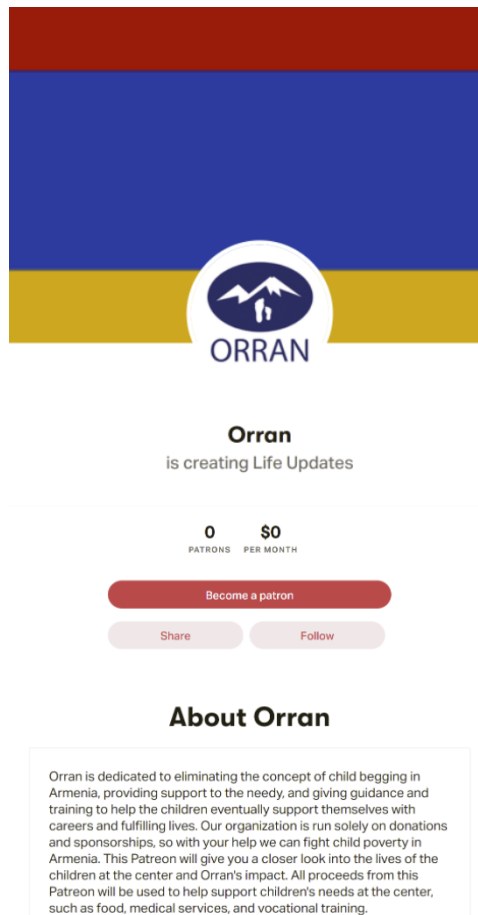

Figure 5: Updated test Patreon based on feedback.

In addition to the test platform, we made a basic manual on how to use Patreon. The manual was created to describe how to use Patreon to make it easier for Orran volunteers to create accounts. The manual includes how to create an account on Patreon, how to set up a page and preferences, how to make different types of posts, and how patrons (in this case sponsors) can sign up for their page. Within the manual, many screenshots of Patreon setup were included. A sample of the manual can be seen below:
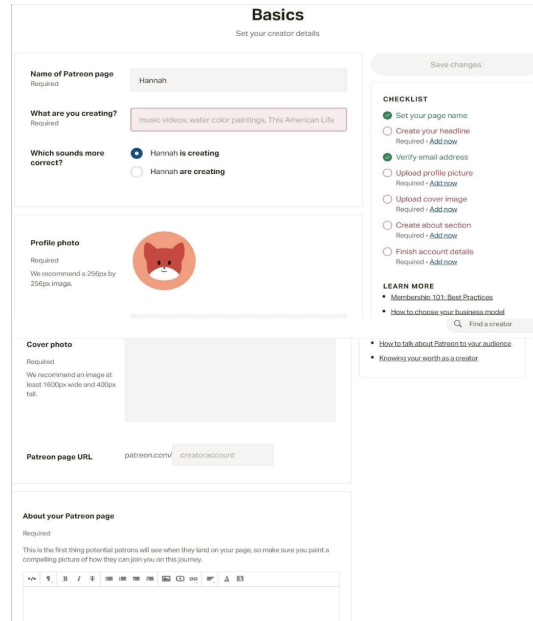

Figure 6: Creating your page by including basic information. From Patreon.com.

The manual also includes other tips and helpful resources for how to get help or any additional questions regarding Patreon answered. The full manual was sent to Orran as a guide for using the platform. They have the option to use as much or as little of it as desired. On the donation section of Orran's main website, Orran.org, there would be a link to the Patreon as well as testimonials from volunteers, children and, potentially, alumni of Orran. This will hopefully encourage sponsors to donate as it follows the advice of some of those we interviewed.

Recommendations

We created a test Patreon for Orran that could be used as a prototype for their official one. In this test Patreon we created a short informational section that details what Orran does and how this Patreon will benefit the children who receive support from Orran. Additionally, we recommend that Orran promote this Patreon on their social media accounts to draw in more potential sponsors. We also created a sample post as a template for Orran's future posts. Our sample posts detail a hypothetical journal entry of a child's day. This post included the meals provided by Orran that the child had at the center that day as well as the workshop in which the child participated. A post similar to our sample post would be shown on the Patreon for donors who have joined any of the customized tiers that Orran creates. People visiting Orran's Patreon would only be able to see a preview of the testimonial and then be prompted to become a member of Orran's Patreon to see the entire post. We recommend that these posts constitute a portion of the information that is being provided to the donor so that the donor is able to see first-hand what the children are doing and form a connection with them. This type of journal entry style posts could be released weekly, and follow a different child's activities every week. We also recommend that posts should be created around special occasions, such as Orran's anniversary or holidays. Creating a post that highlights the special events that occurred on that day would help diversify the posts to keep sponsors engaged and help them celebrate these activities with Orran so they feel like an important part of the center. Another variation of Patreon posts we suggest are testimonials from "alumni" from Orran. Similar to the stories that are highlighted on their website, creating posts where young professionals talk about the impact of Orran on their success would help stress the importance of Orran in the local community. Similar to this would be testimonials from family members of the children at Orran, demonstrating how Orran has impacted their family for the better. All of the posts on the Patreon would serve a larger purpose of creating an emotional connection between the donors and the children and center as a whole which would in turn increase donor retention.

Along with creating a test Patreon for Orran to model, we have some recommendations about promoting the page as well. We believe it would be best, based on our own knowledge and our interview with Professor Harrison, that Orran's social media, specifically their Instagram and Facebook, should be used as a tool to market their Patreon page. A social media post can be created to notify donors about a new Patreon post since these forms of social media tend to garner more traffic than it would typically see from just Patreon site searches. This will also be a way to promote the Patreon to potential sponsors. By informing people on social media, Orran will draw attention to a beneficial way for sponsors to donate to the center that gives back to them in the form of specialized content about the center's and children's activities.

In addition to giving us data for the Patreon, the interviews we performed gave us a lot of fundraising ideas and recommendations for Orran to increase their donations. To encompass all the fundraising strategies we discuss below, it is recommended that it may be beneficial to bring in someone part time with more fundraising and/or web design knowledge to help manage online fundraising at Orran.

The pandemic has brought a lot of attention to online events. David Pula recommended that Orran could host more in-person events, as well as online fundraising events such as events on Zoom. These could be online auctions, having virtual performances and concerts to raise money, or interactive games with viewers. This was suggested during an interview as a great way to raise more money as more people would be able to attend events if they're online if they live outside of Armenia. To help spread awareness of these online events, using social media more would be a great way to bring attention to Orran. Social media is a great way to bring public attention to any fundraising events and can aid in online fundraising events such as Facebook Live or Instagram Live (live videos from the events). As Orran already has some social media accounts, we recommend that they increase their usage of these accounts to draw more attention to any events. They currently do not utilize their social media for fundraising and promoting events, but doing so would help promote their Patreon page along with events. Additionally, as they already have a YouTube account, we recommend that they use YouTube more actively, by showing videos of what goes on at Orran, as well as uploading testimonials from children or Orran alumni is a great way to show the world what Orran is doing and to encourage people to donate.

For possible ideas for events, they could have a Founder's Day where they celebrate the anniversary of Orran every year or they could create challenges for people to encourage donations. They could do letter writing campaigns to local Armenian businesses or individuals to invite them to be local sponsors or they could encourage current corporate sponsors of Orran to maybe match donations made at fundraising events. It was also recommended to us by Liz Chirico that Orran encourage repeat donors to continue donating. To encourage people, concepts that were recommended to us included recurring gifts, sending encouraging messages to them and showing repeat donors how their donations are helping, and sending thank you messages to existing donors. These would be available to people if they donate monthly or if they sponsor a child.

Additionally, it might be useful to see if Orran is interested in surveying existing donors to see what would make them donate more to Orran. To show appreciation for people who donate the most, there could be extra benefits given to top donors such as publicly acknowledging their contributions made to them. This could be done on a part of their website and initially posted on their social media for announcement. Finally, it was recommended by Liz Chirico that Orran should incorporate other online payment services into their website or fundraising events to make donations easier. These services would have to be ones that would work in Armenia as some of these services don't work internationally. They currently have PayPal as one option to donate, but it may be better to give donors more options so they're more likely to donate. It was stated to us by Ms. Chirico that the simpler it is to make donations, the more likely people will donate.
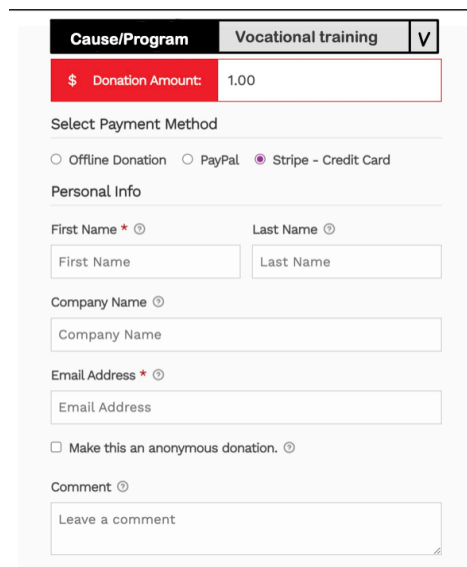
Our interview with Ms. Brianne Ross, Director of Advancement at WPI's Office of Advancement, revealed many concerns with the design and content of the website. Her suggestions focused on the cluttered nature of the homepage and the inability to direct donations

to a specific cause. The homepage has a lot of information about the different causes Orran works on, the testimonials, and ways to support Orran. Brianne Ross recommended reducing the content on the home page and moving most of the information to different pages within the website. We recommend the following alterations:

- Add a banner to the old website, orran.am, that directs users to the new website, orran.org

- Allow donations to be directed towards a specific cause or department of Orran

- Move information away from the home page using links to redirect users to more specific pages.

Orran was also looking for a way to potentially delete their older website: Orran.am, or direct people to their more updated website: Orran.org. The new website has more up to date information regarding the center and Orran is hoping to direct people towards the new website so they can learn more about where donations are going. This could help increase donations as well. If they couldn't delete the website, then they could modify the home page of Orran.am so at the top of the page it says, "to see our more updated website visit Orran.org " and have it be a link to the new website.

We learned from multiple interviews with members of the WPI Office of Advancement, many people within the fundraising field have noticed the desire to donate directly to a cause, rather than to an organization. For example, rather than donating directly to Orran someone could donate to their "Sponsor a Child" or "Vocational Training" program. According to Ms. Stephanie Pasha and Ms. Liz Maizite, providing details of where the money is being used increases donors' satisfaction and their likelihood to donate again.

Figure 7: Recommended Donate Now form with addition of a Cause/Program box. Originally from Orran.org.

On the website, there is a Donate Now button. There is a comment box within the donation form, but creating a drop-down box that allows donors to pick where they would like their money to go makes the form more user friendly, as seen in Figure 7.

Figure 8: Recommended addition of a Cause/Program box on the individual causes pages, separate from the Donate Now form. Originally from Orran.org

Within the Causes page, there are ways for people to donate, as seen in Figure 8. When someone clicks to donate to a specific program, the same donation form is used when the standard Donate Now button is clicked. Additionally, the home page is full of valuable information, but this can sometimes come off as overwhelming to a potential donor. On the home page, there is a lot of information in one area and there are multiple and conflicting messages about the donations and if the money is supporting children or the elderly community, who also benefit from Orran. Another recommendation that would aid in this effort is to create linked buttons that redirect the user to a web page with more information under each program, as seen in Figure 9. Finally, we plan on sharing the case study Human Rights-Based Child Sponsorship: A Case Study of ActionAid, (Noh, 2019) we used as a source on RBA with Orran to give extra guidance on ethical promotion of children for their organization.
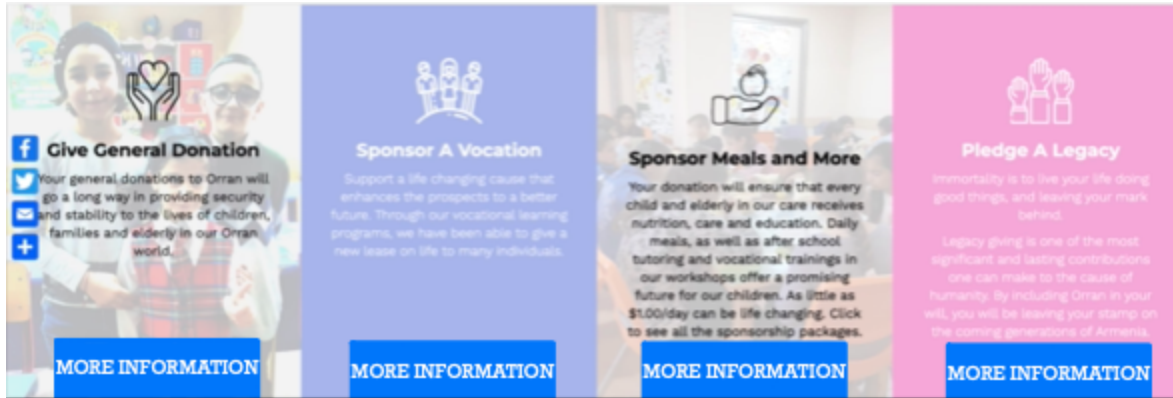
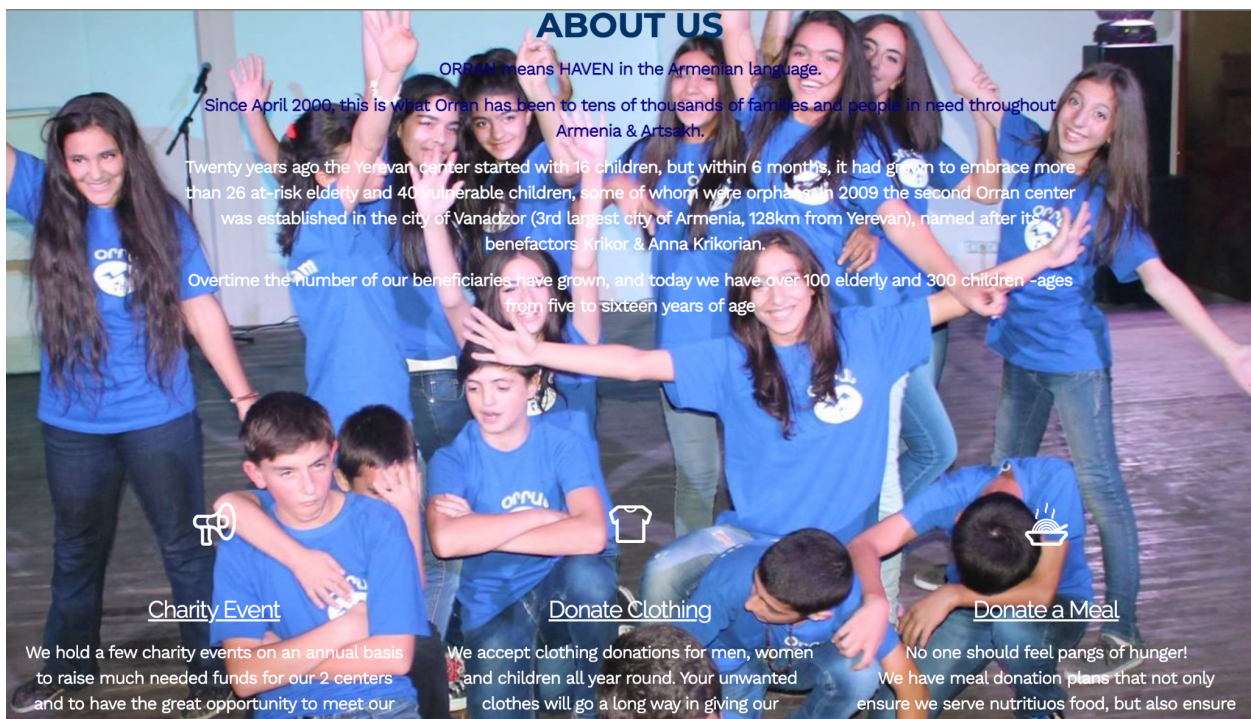*Figure 9:* Section of Causes webpage with added "More Information" buttons. Originally from Orran.org

Figure 10: Direct image taken from the website on the About Us page. Originally from Orran.org

Another example of changes that can be made can be seen in Figure 10, where there is a large image on Orran.org's "About Us" page covered with text that fades into the photo. It is difficult to read the information provided on this page and would be easier if the text was moved to below the image. This is one of the many slight changes that need to be made to Orran.org to improve user experience.

Conclusion

The goal of our project was to recommend and potentially design a system for Orran in hopes to increase donor retention and create stable donations for the organization through connections to the children. We got a better understanding of how Orran and similar programs function and fundraise, assessed the long-term benefits of Orran for the children and determined the best platform for Orran to have a place to connect the children who they support with donors. We were able to give Orran recommendations on how to create and maintain a Patreon account for the organization, as well as other fundraising and improve the visibility of their organization. If Orran gets the sponsors more involved, they can potentially build a stronger community of donors. This increased donor pool will give Orran more opportunities to help children at the center and expand their organization. The implications of expanding Orran hugely impact the community well-being since the center would be able to house more children and in turn help combat issues of child poverty in Armenia. Though these instances would be short-term initially, increasing the number of children that are a part of the program will help more children eventually become higher education recipients and/or young professionals. This pipeline will help decrease issues of generational poverty that have long since plagued Armenia.

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Appendix A – Interview Questions

Interview Questions for Orran Volunteers:

- What does an average day look like for a child at Orran?
- What are the students capable of regarding computers?
- Would it be possible to have volunteers monitor platform activities of both the children and the sponsors?
- How long have you been at Orran? Have you been able to see a change in any children from when they first came to Orran to the present? If so, can you describe them for me.
- What do you believe is the biggest benefit that Orran provides for these children?
- What motivated you to start working and/or volunteering at Orran?

Interview Questions for Similar Organizations:
- If your organization has a sponsoring program, what tools are being used to run it?
- What has been successful with the program? Unsuccessful?
- Who runs/monitors the program?

Structured Interview Questions:
- How can we design a platform to be user friendly?
- Can we create any safety precautions through a platform for children?
- Besides Patreon or a subscription service, are there any other platforms that may work better?
- Do you have any experience using Patreon or a service similar to it? Can you describe your experiences with this platform?

Examples of Unstructured Interview Questions:
- Tell us more about your position at WPI?
- What methods do you use for fundraising?
- What are the online fundraising methods which you use?
- What are some effective ways nonprofits and NGOs have fundraised across America/best marketing strategies.
- What catches people's attention about nonprofits and NGOs/outreach strategies?
- Do nonprofits and NGOs have a sponsoring program, what tools are being used to run it? Who runs/monitors the program?
- What has been successful with the program? What has been unsuccessful?
- We were thinking about Patreon, but are there any other platforms that you think would be better?
- Do you know anyone who would know more about Patreon?
- Are there any specific professors or people we should reach out to?
- Is there anything you wish we had asked you?

Appendix B – Recommended Consent Form for Parents of Orran's Children

Consent form for parents of Orran's children:

Agreement:

On the one hand, "Orran" Benevolent NGO Armenia, in the name of the coordinator of the education department Seza Aslanyan and on the other hand the parent/guardian (hereinafter referred to as the "Parent"), signed this agreement on the following.

1. **Subject of the Agreement**

This agreement defines the relationship between the "beneficiary family" and "Orran" Benevolent NGO.

2. **The rights of the parties**

2.1 Orran has the following rights:

2.1.7 With the parent's signature, use the child's name, photos, biographical information in newspapers, TV programs, websites, etc., as well as in the organization's booklets and information leaflets.

I Agree: _____   I Disagree: _____

3. **Research Project and Internet Platform**

3.1 The goal of this project is to create a system for financial donors to meet children at Orran and potentially choose to sponsor those they meet. We want to make the children profiles, to their comfort levels, for the sponsors to learn about them. The end goal is to provide Orran with a system to allow donors to learn about the direct impact their donations are making on the children's lives. There will be no direct contact between the donors and the children.

3.2 The individuals involved in this research is students from Worcester Polytechnic Insitute: Elizabeth Cole, Amaya Massari, Hannah Allen, and students from American University of Armenia: Davit Balabekyan, Christine Harutyunyan. To contact this team, please email gr-orraniqp@wpi.edu

3.3 Participation in this research is not required. You have the ability to opt out of the research if you initial give consent. If you do not choose for your child to be involved in the research or opt your child out of the research, there will be no penalties or loss of benefits.
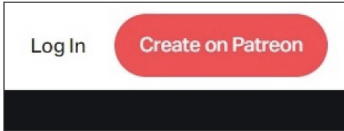
- I agree to allow my child to be involved in the the research project outlined in Section 3
- I disagree to allow my child to be involved in the research project

Appendix C – Patreon Manual Sample

Patreon Manual Sample:

CREATE AN ACCOUNT

1. **GO TO WEBSITE**

2. **CLICK ON "CREATE ON PATREON" ON THE TOP RIGHT OF THE PAGE**

   Log In   Create on Patreon

3. **CREATE A NEW ACCOUNT UNDER "SIGN UP".**
   You also have the options to sign in with Google accounts, sign in with Facebook, or log in to a previously existing account.

ORRAN

CREATING YOUR PAGE

- **BASICS**
- **TIERS**
- **MERCH (OPTIONAL)**
- **GETTING PAID**
- **PAGE SETTINGS**
- **PREVIEW**
- **ADVANCED**