



‘WE RAISED £8,000 BY TELLING OUR STORY’

To run a successful fundraising campaign, be specific about what you want to achieve – and why it’s important, says **Georgina Bygott**, PTA chair at St Michael’s C of E Primary School in Oxford

It wasn’t until I asked our primary school headteacher what the PTA could help with that I learnt about the shortage of computers at the school. As an IT project manager, I was shocked to discover that our one-form-entry school of 200 pupils possessed only 30 laptops. This meant that IT lessons were limited

as one set of laptops was rotated around the school.

Since I had been unaware of this issue, I realised that most other parents would be too. I also knew that, like me, they would want to do something about it. We all appreciate our wonderful school and want to ensure the teachers

have everything they need to enable our children to achieve high learning standards.

This clearly includes equipping our school with the necessary tech for the new computing curriculum. So last autumn our PTA launched the ‘Project CAFÉ’ (Chromebooks Accessible For Everyone) campaign to raise £8,000 for 30 laptops and a storage trolley.

We began with an event to engage the school community in something fun – a cake (or biscuit) decorating competition, open to pupils, parents and school staff. This was a ‘soft’ way of introducing Project CAFÉ and getting people on board, without immediately asking for money. Entrants paid a £2 fee to submit a photograph, and could enter as many times as they liked, with all proceeds going towards the laptop campaign.

Following this, we carried out pre-launch messaging about the crowdfunding campaign, through ParentMail and our PTA slot in the headteacher’s messages home. The aim was to raise awareness about Project CAFÉ and why it was important, and the feedback we received showed that parents



► appreciated knowing exactly what their donation would be used for and how it would benefit their children.

We launched our crowdfunding page on the InvestMyCommunity platform in November 2020. This gave us a further opportunity to tell the Project CAFÉ story and reach out to our community.

In our story, we outlined our aims of enabling teachers to give computer lessons to our children whenever they chose, and of equipping pupils with the knowledge they needed to be tech-savvy. We explained that we wanted to make these aims attainable by starting small, and that £195 would purchase one Chromebook.

We detailed the important things the children would be able to learn about, which included algorithms, writing programmes, debugging and working with digital content, as well as email and keyboard skills.

In particular, we highlighted that they would learn about internet

safety, keeping personal information private, and understanding how to spot phishing and scam emails. We also flagged up the opportunities for developing communication and collaboration skills.

It was the first time the PTA had run a crowdfunding campaign, so we opted for the premium package, and the support we received from

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InvestMyCommunity’s Julie Beale was invaluable. She helped us formulate our story and tweaked the text on our messaging to give it more impact, as well as creating small soundbites for us.

With a campaign like this, you have to stay visible to keep it at the front of people’s minds. So we

continued to feed information and updates to supporters, with reminders to donate and ‘thank you’ messages about funds raised. We also made a short video with an appeal by the headteacher, and a number of pupils talking about their IT lessons and why they liked them.

The platform’s share buttons, make it easy for supporters to share our page or pass on our leaflet. You can also set up sub campaigns as part of your main page. We did a ‘Twelve Days of Christmas’ challenge, where pupils could set up their own fundraising page and ask family members to sponsor them to complete 12 activities (such as writing a letter to an elderly relative or neighbour, or learning eight ways to spell and say ‘hello’ in another language) over the Christmas holidays. My son, Ludo, was able to raise more than £200 by completing his 12 challenges.

Donations to the crowdfunding campaign came in quickly, raising £4,600, along with two very generous anonymous donations made directly to Project CAFÉ.

The astounding amount of money that was collectively raised allowed the school to order 30 new Chromebooks, which were included in the electronic devices sent to families who needed them during the January lockdown.

As well as crowdfunding, we raised additional funds by running a series of Covid-secure events. Instead of a Christmas fair, we ran a whole school draw for Christmas hampers created from donations brought in by pupils.

We also organised a Winter Lights trail around 50 houses, and we organised a Zoom Santa event and sold wreaths. By mid-January, we had reached our goal of £8,000 and we hope to buy even more laptops when the Gift Aid comes in.

We’ve turned our crowdfunding campaign into a regular giving page on InvestMyCommunity, and we are now planning to set up a fundraising page for each class for future sponsorship events. Sharing the details of what the schools needs – and why it is important – has definitely alerted parents to how we can all help provide a better education for our children.