

REFUGE: A STORY OF SUCCESSFUL SELECTION, MIGRATION AND FUNDRAISING

Background

Cheswick, West London in 1971, Refuge in the United Kingdom opened the world's first safe house for women and children escaping domestic violence. They're committed to a world where domestic violence is not tolerated.



A world where women and children can live in safety. Until late 2019, Refuge relied largely on statutory contributions. But, in 2020 after a successful Christmas campaign, the United Kingdom went into Covid-19 lockdown and calls to Refuge's free 24/7 helpline increased by 50%. **Refuge responded and support came in droves transforming their fundraising.**

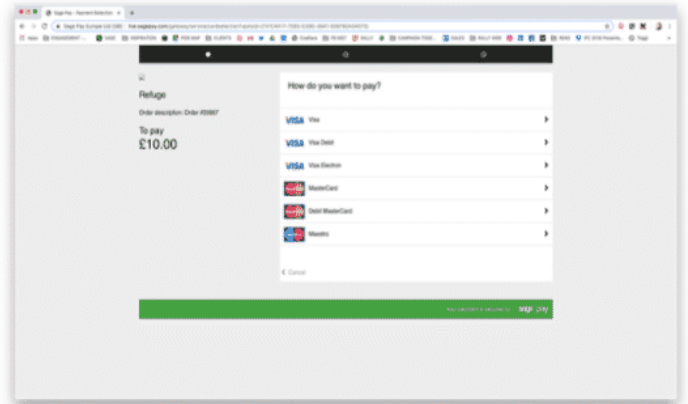
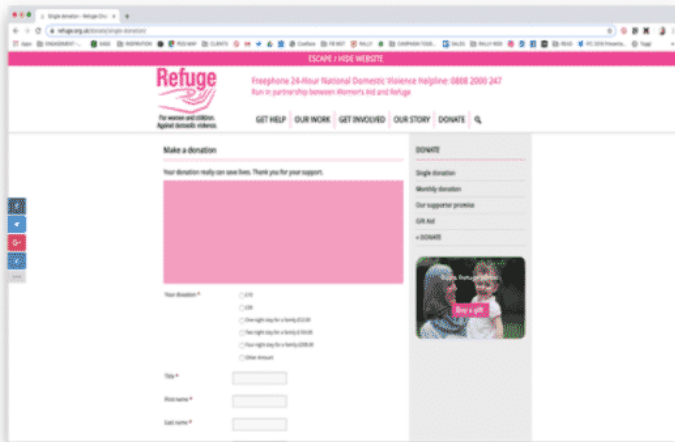
Problems for Refuge to Solve

It was mid-2019 and Refuge had just hired a new Head of Supporter Fundraising, Jo Felgate. Jo, who had been heading online fundraising programs for charities for years, took a long look at Refuge's programme. She had come into a small supporter base, there was a new team and a very limited budget. Internally there were issues to overcome.

There was a strong focus on and commitment to building a digital movement.

From the digital side, there were several issues. Website traffic was largely driven by media placements and influencers. The organisation had little control of how people came to the site – or what they were asked to do once there.

Additionally, user experience was awful. After analysing things, Jo found it took three clicks just to get to a donation form from the homepage. Once there, the form was very long and felt dated. When you finally made it to the payment options a rather strange pop-up appeared separate from the donation form. Conversion rates on the current donation form were around 2.78%. Still £200,000 came through annually.



The question: Clearly people want to give, how can we make it easier? Also, how can we take control of driving our own traffic to the website and forms?

The Solutions

Jo set three goals for improvements and moving things forward for the digital fundraising team.

Step one – fix the forms

After identifying there were issues with the current digital tools, Jo set out to find a toolset that offered what Refuge needed. After evaluating several platforms, **Refuge chose Engaging Networks**. The integrated platform included email and donation forms which could be easily built and customised with minimal support. Additionally – a technology-forward approach – Refuge noted that, while they weren't using all the tools right away, the functionality they may need to grow was already available with Engaging Networks.

Having chosen a new platform, it was time to get to work. Refuge chose an Accredited Engaging Networks partner, **Forward Action**, to redesign the donation forms and email templates on a rapid timeline. **They needed to complete migration, form and email designs and go live in only six weeks!**

Forward
//Action



With your donation we can save lives, and get one step closer to a world free from domestic abuse.

At Refuge, we support thousands of women and children who turn to us when they're trying to escape domestic abuse. Help us be there for every woman and child who needs us, by donating today.

1) Amount
2) Details
3) Payment

Monthly
Just once

£3
£5
£10

£15
£25
£50

Other amount £

£5 a month could provide emotional support to a child.
90% of domestic abuse happens in the presence of a child. Your regular gift could help children to overcome the trauma of witnessing or experiencing domestic abuse.

£10 a month could give a woman her independence back.
Women are often forced to stop working by their abusers, or they have to leave their jobs when they escape abuse. Your regular gift could provide employment and financial advice from our skilled staff, to help give a woman back her independence and support her back into work.

£15 a month could provide an emergency pack for a woman arriving at a refuge.
Every day, women escaping life-threatening situations seek safety in our refuges. Many arrive with little more than the clothes they are wearing. Your gift could provide toiletries, food and clothing to help a woman through her first night.

Continue



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Step two – drive their own traffic

Now that Refuge had the tools to do so, they wanted to drive their OWN traffic to the site – and more specifically to the new beautifully designed donation forms. In the midst of migration, Refuge discovered that they would lose nearly half of their relatively small email list due to lack of necessary opt-in information. **A possibly devastating blow just before the holidays.**

Refuge went live on Engaging Networks on 25 November 2019. They immediately began emailing their list to drive traffic to **donation forms** and their **Refuge parcels page**.

Forward Action and Refuge tested relentlessly. They encountered issues not uncommon to a new eCRM such as learning new tracking. They tested old and new methodologies.

Christmas Campaign Results

The Christmas campaign was an overwhelming success. And the testing yielded results that Refuge could carry forward into 2020.

- Email open rates were a very strong 34% – it was a small but mighty email list
- Refuge increased income by 21% over the previous holiday season
- There was a dramatic 71% increase in direct debits (monthly gifts) through new forms
- Page conversion rates went from 2.78% to around 17.5% – an enormous success!

But... Refuge wasn't finished. There was step three. Mother's Day...

Step three – Mother's Day 2020

This was the next big push after the holiday season. The plan was to build on the intensive testing they did during the Christmas campaign and then...

Covid-19 happened.

Refuge had to rapidly pivot into response mode. They took their previous learnings and adapted the campaign from a standard giving campaign to a response campaign. Forward Action advised the following:

- Adjust advertising to a Covid-19 emergency ask with emergency appeal emails
- Covid-19 specific donation pages and website banners
- An upsell ask added to thank you pages asking donors to become monthly donors – making their support ongoing during the crisis
- Testing regular appeals against sending traffic to the Refuge parcels page where they added new relief-related parcels

The message and situation of being locked indoors with an abuser resonated with many people – a potentially scary situation.

This idea was bolstered by data of increased abuse reports and increased calls to the helpline. As a result, there was a robust media response and surge in media coverage.

Buy a Refuge parcel for a woman or child escaping domestic abuse

Refuge parcels are bundles that women and children urgently need when escaping domestic violence. They also make personal, touching gifts to buy on behalf of a loved one.

Buy a Refuge parcel



Helpline Parcel

£10.00

Quantity

Calls to our 24-hour National Domestic Abuse Helpline have increased since lockdown measures were introduced. Our support is needed more than ever by women experiencing domestic abuse. This parcel could enable us to continue providing life-saving support through our Helpline.



Online Support Parcel

£15.00

Quantity

For most women there is a limited opportunity to make a call to the Helpline, in lockdown this could be significantly decreased when living with a perpetrator. This parcel could go towards providing real one-to-one support via live chat to a woman who doesn't feel safe calling the Helpline.



Emergency Parcel

£25.00

Quantity

Many women staying at a refuge have limited access to funds due to years of financial abuse. This can make buying necessities during this challenging time particularly difficult. This parcel could provide basic necessities such as toiletries, nappies, food and clothing to ensure that a family staying in our refuge has the essentials they need.



Emergency Accommodation Parcel

£52.00

Quantity

We have 48 refuges throughout the country which are open to women and children seeking a safe place to stay. Our staff are often the first to hear of the abuse which women seeking our support have experienced for months or even years. This parcel could provide refuge accommodation for a woman and her children so they can wake up safe and supported.



Train a Volunteer Parcel

£46.00

Quantity

Helpline volunteers take part in an intensive training programme to equip them with specialist skills and knowledge such as understanding complex legal options, housing rights and how to access domestic abuse services. This parcel could fund a day of training for a volunteer to learn how to support women who access the Helpline.



Run a Refuge

£500.00

Quantity

Our refuges provide emergency temporary accommodation for women and children fleeing abuse. They give women time and space to make decisions about their future and our specialist refuge staff are on hand to provide advice, one-to-one emotional and practical support. This parcel could keep one of our 48 refuges running for a day.

Continue

Your generous donation will be used to support women and children escaping domestic abuse throughout the year. The donation amounts that are represented are illustrative of the support that we are able to offer through your generous backing.



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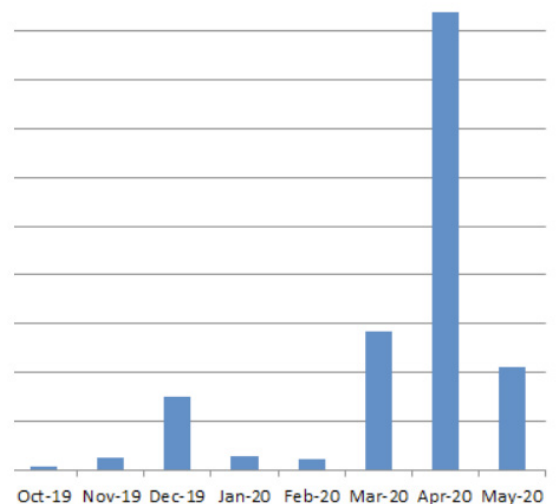
Mother's Day response was amazing, it blew us away really.

– Jo Felgate

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Mother's Day and the following six weeks, Refuge:

- Acquired 18,000 new donors from Facebook ads
- Raised over £1,000,000 (61% attributed to Facebook ads)
- Saw a 5:1 ROI on Facebook ads
- Saw a 6325% increase in fundraising over same period in the previous year
- Found their parcels ads on Facebook had a 495% return on ad spend



More unrestricted or voluntary revenue for Refuge has had a transformative effect on their services.

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The influx of voluntary donations has transformed the way that fundraising is viewed in the organization.

– Jo Felgate

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Key Takeaways

Jo reflected on a few key takeaways after a rushed eCRM selection, migration and launch just before Christmas – all leading into a planned but suddenly altered Mother’s Day campaign.

- Look at your existing program and identify where you can add value
- Small changes = big results
- Work across teams to ensure you can communicate and pivot quickly when needed
- Include your database team every step of the way
- Track and test everything
- Utilise partners’ expertise

This exciting case study was presented at the Engaging Networks Community Conference in May and October of 2020. To hear it straight from Jo and the Forward Action team, visit <https://www.engagingnetworks.net/refuge-study> to watch the video..

Thank you

Engaging Networks is proud to work with amazing charities around the world like Refuge. Please visit their website at <https://www.refuge.org.uk/> to learn more about the vital work they do.