



## How to Sell Kids on Nursing: Think Like a Kid!

An African-American nurse zooms through the air on jet-propelled shoes while a poem tells the story of “nurses with rocket shoes” who “flew to Mars and went faster than cars.” A racially and gender-diverse group of costumed superheroes invites boys and girls to join the Nurse Force, where they can “save lives and pick up awesome skills.” A similarly diverse group of teenagers smiles knowingly, because they’ve just found out that “nurses earn more than accountants and have more job choices than Web engineers.” A stark photo of a car crash sends a literally hard-hitting message to teens that nurses are important people with the power to save lives.

Whether it’s trying to sell the idea that nursing is a really cool career to elementary school kids, middle schoolers or high school students, the Virginia Partnership for Nursing (VPN)’s “Nurses Change Lives” education campaign manages to press exactly the right buttons for every age level. There’s a simple reason why this award-winning campaign, developed in association with Bernard Hodes Group, a recruitment communications and staffing solutions agency, is so on target: It was based on child development research to determine the messages and visuals that would resonate most effectively with kids.

Nurses Change Lives, which is being promoted to every school in Virginia, consists of three thematic campaigns targeted to grades K-3, 4-8 and 9-12, respectively. Each has its own poster, collateral materials and interactive Web site for kids. According to Karen Grimes, branch manager of Bernard Hodes Group’s Richmond office, the “Nurses with Rocket Shoes” theme was chosen for the youngest kids because “the research shows this age group grasps concepts like nursing more easily when they’re based on fantasy rather than reality.” The Web site includes activities like written and audio versions of the poem, downloadable coloring pages and fun facts about nurses and health.

For grades 4-8, Hodes created the comic book-inspired “Nurse Force” theme because “the thought process for this age group is more coherent, organized and abstract,” Grimes explains. “They’re able to comprehend the principle of concrete problem solving and they relate easily to identifiable icons like superheroes, like Spiderman.” On the Web site, kids can meet nurse superheroes (“Code Name: Sentinel; Super Power: Empathic”), explore links to health and fitness sites, and vote for what they’d do if they were in the Nurse Force (e.g., work with kids, work in the ER).

Because teenagers are the toughest sell of all, the high school campaign uses a two-pronged attack. The car-crash theme is designed to reach teens on an emotional level—“we knew we had to create a message that would jolt them into action,” says Grimes—while the “nurses earn more” message appeals to their intellectual side. “If we’re going to be competing for kids who are considering becoming lawyers and Web engineers,” Grimes notes, “we need to give them the message that there’s really a career ladder in nursing, there’s a lot of opportunities and the money’s good.”

To see these campaigns in action, and order the posters for your own use, point your rocket shoes toward [www.nurseschangelives.com](http://www.nurseschangelives.com).