Public service campaigns offer art directors, photographers, copywriters and a host of other creatives unique opportunities to help their communities and demonstrate their skills at the same time.

Art Director Mel Hioki and photographer Frank Tedesco rented a car and drove around Harlem for four hours one Sunday, looking for just the right burned-out building for their New York City water conservation campaign.

"We wanted to find a graphically nice one that hadn't been cinderblocked up," said Hioki. "Eventually we checked with the fire department. We stripped in the fire hydrant (page 15) later.

"Kids playing with fire hydrants waste a lot of water, and so does using a garden hose or keeping the water on while shaving. The city gave us a list.

"We had total freedom, but we had to do the job on our own time. We mainly did it at lunch or on nights or weekends. The writer and I would work on it from six to eight in the morning, then again until ten or eleven at night."

Hioki and Tedesco are part of the AD2 club in New York, an organization of advertising-industry creatives under age 30.

"The city didn't want to spend much money," Hioki added. "If we didn't come up with anything they were going to use their old posters again."

Other art directors usually do not have to burn the candle at both ends to complete their public service campaigns, since many..."
agencies willingly contribute time and resources.

"Public service clients are usually very appreciative," said Gary Goldstein, art director at Young & Rubicam, who put together subway posters and radio spots featuring Bill Cosby talking to kids and parents for the New York City Drop Out Prevention Fund (page 16).

"You tend to put the demands on yourself," said Goldstein. "When you hear that 50% of all New York City high school students will drop out before they finish, it's hard not to do something for those kids. As a parent of two kids I was especially concerned."

In this upbeat campaign Cosby uses a rap music type approach on the radio commercial for teenagers, and a more factual approach for parents. The subway posters show him on a surprisingly litter-free basketball court, with a group of racially mixed high school kids behind him.

Goldstein also took a trip to Harlem, this time to interview public school children. "We asked the kids who they believe
in,” said Goldstein. “And Cosby was always on the top of the list. For a lot of reasons he seemed to fit the bill.”

“Bill is terrific,” continued Goldstein. “He wanted to know all about the subject before he would do anything.”


Of the blood drive campaign (page 17), Wong said, “We had a very small budget with the assignment. We had to find a simple, effective way to solve it. That’s why we chose the type treatment.

“You’re selling a very emotional product. You want to make people feel it inside, but you don’t want to overdo it, and have it be on the verge of bad taste.

“The only real target we had are people who have no real reason to give blood. We wanted to show people how stupid they are, how a silly excuse may keep them from saying someone’s life.”

The blood drive posters were put up on the street and near the blood centers. “They couldn’t afford to buy subway space,” said Wong.

A public service campaign about problems families with young children face—the work (page 18) was prepared for Minnesota Early Learning Development (MELD)—hangs in doctor’s offices in Minneapolis.

“We were approached, and they thought we’d do a poster or two. We did six,” said Greg Byers, art director for the project at Bozell Jacobs Kenyon & Eckhardt. “We had a very limited budget. The photography was donated, and the people in the photographs, except for the children, are from MELD.”

Byers continued, “We took an aggressive approach, at least to
get people to think about what they're looking at. Whether they like it or not is another thing. I think we kind of shocked the people at MELD. They expected a more positive approach."

Illustrations of a dead fish and its mutant kin detail the effects of water pollution in Minnesota's lakes, the subject of a campaign put together by Martin/Williams (page 18).

"Public service campaigns offer creative opportunities not available on large accounts," said copywriter Lyle Wedemeyer. "It gives the creative person a little notoriety and a chance to cut through a little more, especially if you believe in the cause. Usually you're handed a product and you may or may not like it or use it.

"The toughest thing is the tendency towards overkill," Wedemeyer continued. "You want to do something with impact without taking a cheap shot. You see a lot of that with the drunk driver campaign. It's too easy.

A very frightening topic was presented in an elegant manner when Grace Kent Sage thought up the assignment of a Kenneth Cole-sponsored ad for AIDS research (page 18).
Celebrity photographer Annie Leibowitz and nine fashion models donated their skills on the project, which is appearing in national fashion magazines.

"Cole saw AIDS as the plague of the '80's," said Sage, creative director and copywriter for the ad.

"We wanted to create an environment of hope for a negative issue, to alter society's perception of a dread disease by removing the stigma and fear associated with it and projecting an aura of positive action in helping to find a cure."

by Randi Hoffman