

Working with the Media

A commonsense guide for communities taking
action to address drug-related issues.

Working with the Media

Acknowledgements

"Working with the Media" was commissioned as part of the Community Drug Information Strategy of the NSW Premier's Department, in response to the NSW Drug Summit recommendations of 1999.

Australian Drug Foundation, in conjunction with Ted Noffs Foundation, Macarthur Drug and Alcohol Youth Project and Centre for Youth Drug Studies, was contracted to undertake the development of this guide and the development and delivery of a statewide professional development workshop program.

The content of this guide builds on the Australian Drug Foundation's previous publication, "The Media Machine" and incorporates feedback obtained from a survey and focus group of Community Drug Action Teams and non-government organisations held in July and August 2001 respectively.

A specially established Taskforce provided expert advice and input throughout the development of this resource. The group is:

Anne Deveson, Expert Advisory Group on Drugs, writer, broadcaster and film-maker

Annie Fraser, NSW Premier's Department (Drugs and Community Action Strategy)

Wayne Geddes, NSW Health (Media and Marketing)

Sue Harding, Mudgee Community Drug Action Team and journalist

Fran Holz, Community Safety Officer, Cessnock and Maitland Councils; member of Community Drug Action Team and former journalist

Nikki Maloney, NSW Premier's Department (Community Drug Information Strategy)

Larry Pierce, Network of Alcohol and Drug Agencies

Working with the Media

Foreword

A key priority of the NSW Government is to support communities who want to take positive action on their local drug issues.

“Working with the Media” has been put together to help drug action teams and local organisations converse with their communities, publicise their activities and generate support.

The media is a major influence in all our lives and an important part of every community. It is a powerful communication tool and seen as an accurate and credible provider of information.

Educating and informing the community about drug-related issues in a responsible way is a challenge for all who work in this area. This guide can assist drug action teams and other organisations engage with their local media to deliver accurate and sensitive messages about drugs and drug use.

The Drugs and Community Action Strategy was a recommendation of the 1999 NSW Drug Summit. As part of that Strategy, there are Community Drug Action Teams around the State taking positive steps to address their local drug problems.

This commonsense guide has been developed to help those drug action teams and other organisations build relationships with regional, community-based and suburban media; and develop skills and understanding about working with the media.

It is hoped that working co-operatively with the media will lead to an informed and more supportive community, prepared and equipped to take action on their local drug issues.



A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read "John Della Bosca". The signature is stylized and cursive.

John Della Bosca MLC
Special Minister of State

Working with the Media

Who is this guide for?

“Working with the Media” has been produced for non-government organisations and Community Drug Action Teams currently working to address drug and alcohol issues in NSW. Others may, however, also find the content and advice in this guide of interest.

Any use of this guide that assists people to work more effectively with the media, to present realistic and sensitive drug-related stories is encouraged.

What is in the guide?

This guide is intended to provide you with the information and tools you need to get your message across to the media and through them to others in your community.

The guide outlines the role of the media and the influence that it can have over attitudes in relation to issues. It explains how the media works and who is involved so that you can use that knowledge to ensure you provide information that will be used and presented accurately. It gives examples of what is ‘news’ and how to present your message in a way that is newsworthy and interesting to the media.

It also gives you some tips on how to respond to the media when approached for information and how to initiate contact with the media through such things as organising events, and developing media releases and kits. Importantly, this guide also outlines how you can establish a media policy or strategy for your organisation or any community group of which you may be a part.

While the guide focuses primarily on print, radio and TV and on news and current affairs, you should remember that the media is changing and goes beyond these traditional forms. Communities can receive information in varying and diverse ways. Internet, for example, is increasingly popular.

Other communication tools like theatre, newsletters, billboards and other art forms should be considered when thinking about getting your message across.

Popular culture media like soapies and lifestyle shows also have a great influence on people’s attitudes and perceptions. Where possible, including important messages about drug issues in entertainment shows can reach people who might miss these messages if they are in the news or current affairs. You could also consider other creative ways to engage the media. For example, if there is a university offering a media course in your area, you could seek student assistance with your work or provide them with case study material for their course work. You might also be able to develop public service messages or script copy in collaboration with media outlets, or establish a network of people who will call talkback radio to discuss drug-related issues.

There are many opportunities for working with the media and you are encouraged to use this guide in any way that best suits your needs.

This guide is also available in a web-based format. It can be viewed and down-loaded at: www.communitybuilders.nsw.gov.au/drugs_action/

Working with the Media

Contents

The Media In Our Society	7
How Does the Media Work?	9
Your Needs vs Journalist Needs	17
Why is that News?	19
Getting to Know You: Working with Journalists	23
Be Proactive, not Reactive	25
Plan, Plan, Plan	29
Launch Yourself into Media Space	35
Gobbledegook Explained	37
The Media Release and Other Methods for Reaching the Media	39
The Media Kit	43
Averting the Interview Nightmare (Be Prepared!)	45
Your Rights	49
And Now, Over to You	51
Appendix 1: Case Study – Countering Negative Publicity	53
Appendix 2: Media Contact List Example	55
Appendix 3: Introductory Letter Example	57
Appendix 4: Media Contacts in NSW	59
Appendix 5: References and Further Reading	87
Appendix 6: Media Kit	89

Working with the Media

The Media in Our Society

"I want to know what's going on."

Pauline Hanson

"Today an estimated minimum 90 per cent of Australians receive news daily making the media, as the conduit, one of the most influential sources of information."

Marian Hudson, *The Media Game*

"The mass media is widely regarded as the non drug-taking community's main source of drug information, ranking ahead of health, welfare and education services."

Chris Sheard, *Drugs in the Media October 1995*

For many people, the media is a main, if not the main, source of information on alcohol and other drugs. What they read, hear and see shapes their attitudes and helps form their opinions.

This means it's vital that the media is providing accurate information and dispelling the myths and misconceptions which surround drugs in our society.

The media is made up of people from all walks of life. As in the general community, there will be people who are misinformed when it comes to alcohol and other drug issues. It's a fair bet that some journalists still believe heroin kills more people than alcohol.

Given that we expect the media to inform the public, it is important they are informed themselves. For this reason communities must work with the media to ensure their readers, listeners and viewers are receiving correct and relevant messages about alcohol and other drugs.

In 1990 a study was done for the Australian Drug Foundation on media coverage of alcohol and other drug issues in Victoria. More than 800 articles were gathered from newspapers and selected magazines. Of these, 60% dealt with illegal drugs, 21% with alcohol and 19% with tobacco.

In 1996, the Australian Drug Foundation commissioned an Australia-wide follow-up report about drug reporting in the media: Chris Sheard's 'Drugs In The Media, October 1995'.

This determined that, of all articles where drugs were the main subject, 33% were about illegal drugs, 17% were about alcohol and 15% were about tobacco. The remaining 35% covered performance enhancing and prescription drugs and articles about drug programs and treatments.

In NSW, 62% were reporting on illegal drugs, compared with 5% on alcohol and 8% on tobacco. Over 50% of all NSW articles reporting on drug issues were rated as negative and 43% as neutral, while only 6% were rated as positive.

Sheard concluded: "while the use of these (illegal) drugs is fairly limited in society (except for marijuana), articles dealing with illicit drugs receive considerably more media attention than either alcohol or tobacco. Add to this the seriousness of the articles, one might become quite alarmed at the illegal drug 'problem' within our communities."

How communities work with the media will largely determine whether journalists report on drug issues negatively or positively.

Working with the Media

The Media in Our Society cont...

Journalists are busy people, who are often expected to produce four or five stories a day, especially in regional areas. Because of their time constraints, they rely on their sources and contacts to provide them with the news, information and background material to write a solid, newsworthy story.

Communities working with drug issues have a media advantage because their issue (drugs in the community) is currently newsworthy.

This resource will help you use that advantage to gain access to the media and, more importantly, send your message to your target groups through the media.



Illustration by Ron Tandberg
courtesy of *How to Use the
Media in Australia* by Iola
Mathews (Penguin 1991).

Working with the Media

How Does the Media Work?

The Speed of Light

The single most important thing to remember is that journalists work to very tight deadlines, often several deadlines a day. The process does not normally allow for detailed critical analysis, nor does it lend itself to the priorities of public health advocates.

A journalist cannot wait while you consult with others on what you are going to say. When a journalist rings you for a comment she or he means now, or at least within the hour.

Understanding this process will greatly enhance the way you deal with the media. The media is just another member of the community. As with all community groups, the more time you take to understand a particular group, the better your relationship with that group will be.

Journalists work in newsrooms which are generally open plan, reflecting the need for easy and quick access to each other.

Each journalist has considerable autonomy and influence over what kinds of stories get put on the news or current affairs agenda.

While stories can stem from editors or from reporters, it is the editors who have the final say and determine the overall direction the paper or program is taking.

At the start of every day or shift, editors, news editors, chiefs-of-staff, chief sub-editors and pictorial editors meet to decide what will go in the paper, on the radio or on television. This is called a news conference. What is discussed at a news conference is determined in part by the editor's knowledge of what is going on in the world, what public relations people are telling her/him and what reporters are telling her/him.

After a news conference, stories will be assigned to individual journalists and/or photographers, whose job it is to 'cover' the story.

The journalist might leave the office to attend an event or interview, or may conduct interviews over the phone.

After this, the journalist will write or record the story. This must be completed by a 'deadline' so that it will be in time for the paper or news bulletin. Journalists talk about their deadline all the time because it is immovable and a critical aspect of their work. If a journalist cannot meet the deadline, the report will not go in the paper or be broadcast. This is more crucial in regional areas because there sometimes may not be another story to fill the gap if the deadline is missed. Occasionally a story may be held over for the next bulletin or paper, but more recent events will take priority.

This process is basically the same for newspapers, radio and television. On-line or internet based newspapers or news organisations vary slightly to off-line media. They are usually linked to an off-line newspaper (for example, the Sydney Morning Herald has www.smh.com.au, while the Illawarra Mercury has www.illawarramercury.com). The on-line editor attends the off-line newspaper's daily news conference and then decides what news items to cover. Some of these stories will be written by the on-line staff but most of the on-line content will come from the off-line newspaper. One major difference between the on and off-line newspapers is that the on-line newspaper constantly updates its site throughout the day, sometimes five or six times in 24 hours. And the 'Breaking News' box can change every five minutes.

SUMMARY

The life cycle of a story is usually very short. Every missed deadline is a missed opportunity. Worse, the news will be published or broadcast whether or not you were able to respond and may result in a one-sided report.

Working with the Media

How Does the Media Work? cont...

Media Jargon

Like health, education or law enforcement, media is an industry which uses jargon. It is helpful for you in dealing with the media to speak the same language, or at least understand it. The following shows print examples but TV and radio use similar language.

Story

The universal name given to an event, idea or news occurrence. It is not just the written or recorded form. Also known as a piece. A good story doesn't mean one that is well written, but one that is newsworthy.

Byline

The line crediting the reporter who wrote the story.

Angle or Hook

The most important part of a news story, or what is chosen as the most important part by the journalist. It is the concept or event which drives the story.

Lead or Intro

The first paragraph of a story, usually containing the most important fact, information or angle.

Colour Story

A story that uses lots of 'colour' or description. It is often written in the first person and describes the writer's feelings or experience of a particular event. For example, in a report of a new Aboriginal program, "A Sydney language program at the University of New England will revive a lost Aboriginal language" is the news; "The Darug language was a beautiful language which was first formally studied by English officers of the First Fleet" is colour.

Green light for church injecting room

PAOLA TOTARO

The Uniting Church has been awarded a licence to operate Australia's first legal heroin injecting room in Kings Cross, paving the way for the facility to open its doors before the end of the year. Just days after the Victorian

Liberals forced the Bracks Government to abandon its own trials of legal heroin injecting rooms, the Police Commissioner, Mr Peter Ryan, and the director-general of health, Mr Mick Reid, have issued an operating licence for a disused pinball parlour at 66 Darlinghurst Road.

Women find it hard to quit

WOMEN who smoke – the single biggest risk factor for heart disease – are likely to need help from drugs and nicotine replacement therapy to kick the habit, researchers said yesterday.

A study at the University of California looked at why women hospitalised with cardiovascular disease continued smoking.

The women, average age 61 years, were mostly Caucasian and quite ill.

The site has passed a raft of rigorous criteria including ground-level entry, easy ambulance access and proximity to Springfield Mall.

Gentleman Pat changes his spot

TENNIS champ Pat Rafter may not be playing his best but his legion of fans are loving the way he looks with a return to longer locks.

"He looked awesome! Sooooo handsome with a bit of hair back on his head!" swooned one fan on a Rafter internet chat site.

Back in February this year, Rafter had his head shaved to raise money for charity.

As his hair grew back, that funny little grey spot on the side of his head, which had remained hidden in a ponytail for all those years, became a focus of attention.

Now that Pat is sporting spiky tufts above his headband, talkback callers and internet chatters are concentrating on his new 'do. "Pat DID look yummy ... does wonders for the soul," said one woman.

Working with the Media

How Does the Media Work? cont...

SPECIAL INVESTIGATION

GANGLAND

A gang of four teenage criminals of Middle Eastern heritage are believed to be behind a string of major office building break-ins over the past year.

Their theft of \$250,000 worth of laptop computers from a North Sydney tower is part of a crime wave generated by organised ethnic gangs across Sydney.

The Daily Telegraph today reveals those gangs have thousands of members and are operating in all spheres of organised crime, from drug importation to extortion and street robbery.

They may be teenagers you see in shopping centres making secret signs such as sucking on coloured straws or wearing red necklaces – signatures of the new criminal fraternity.

IN BRIEF

Case adjourned

A MAN who was to be sentenced for driving more than 45km/h over the speed limit could not attend court yesterday in Ballina because he is in training to become a police officer, the court heard.

Neighbourly bond

A WOMAN kicked a police officer in the stomach during her arrest after assaulting a neighbour, the Ballina Local Court heard yesterday.

—Magistrate Nick Reimer, taking into account the neighbour wanting the assault charge dropped, fined the woman \$300 and placed her on a two-year bond.

Splash

To give prominence to a story by placement, area and display: "It was splashed all over the front page."

Beat-up

A story exaggerated beyond its importance. Lightweight facts given undeserved prominence. Beat-ups can happen on a day with few major news events.

Brief or Filler

A small story, often only one or two paragraphs long.

Hard News

New or important facts rather than comment, colour or description. The lead story of a paper or broadcast will almost certainly be hard news.

Par

Short for paragraph. Newspaper stories are often measured according to how many pars they might be worth. A reporter might ask a news editor or chief-of-staff how many pars they want.

Break or Scoop or Exclusive

To publish or broadcast a story before anyone else. If you promise journalists they can break your story, you will probably at least get a hearing.

Human Interest Story

A short descriptive story about a person or a group of people. Not necessarily a news story but one that is interesting (for example, the length of the hair of a good-looking tennis star).

Cheers as HMAS Newcastle sails gloriously into port

AFTER 28 years in the Navy, Captain Davyd Thomas has finally steered his ship back home.

The proud Novocastrian was in command of HMAS Newcastle as she sailed through Newcastle heads yes-

terday afternoon with colours aloft and the Newcastle Knights flag flying high above her deck.

More than 200 civilians, including Newcastle Lord Mayor John Tate, Knights chief executive officer Michael

Hill, students from Hunter schools, naval cadets and family members of the 192-strong crew, made the five-hour journey from the ship's base in Sydney.

Working with the Media

How Does the Media Work? cont...

Follow-up

Follows an earlier story, looking for a new angle or more background.

Running Story

Story that develops rapidly between editions or over several days.

Embargo

A request not to publish information before a given time. For example, if an important person is delivering a speech you want the media to report, you may send them a copy of the speech embargoed until the time of delivery. Embargoes are no longer used very much: one problem with them is the combination of globalisation and on-line media. If you embargo some groundbreaking cancer research until World Tobacco Day and it is reported on-line in Australia on that day, it will actually be read in the rest of the world the day before. A better alternative is to notify the media of the upcoming release of the information, rather than the information itself. Journalists can then plan ahead to cover that story on the release date.

Feature

Long story, often with more background, description and opinion. Not necessarily related to the day's events but usually connected with current issues.

Picture Story

A dominant or display photograph with an accompanying short article or caption.

Profile

Biographical story or feature on a person.

Column

Regular space given to a journalist or commentator where they can express opinions. It is often accompanied by a picture byline or the word 'opinion'.

Lead Time

A term used mainly in reference to magazines, it means the preparation time before a publication's deadline. It is important to be aware of lead times. If you wanted to obtain coverage in the December issue of Dolly, you would probably have to contact the magazine two or three months before.

Talent

A credible, interesting spokesperson for radio, press or television interviews.

Tight

The way to write a news story, where every word counts and there is no unnecessary detail or embellishment.

On the Record, Off the Record & Off the Cuff

On the record means everything you say can be reported and attributed to you. Off the record can mean either everything you say can be reported but not attributed to you, or nothing you say can be reported. To be on the safe side, it is best not to say anything 'off the record'. If you do intend to tell the journalist something controversial which must not be printed or attributed to you, then you must make it completely clear.

It is also best to be wary of saying anything 'off the cuff', as such a comment may sound awful when reported in the media.



Illustration by Ron Tandberg
courtesy of *How to Use the Media in Australia* by Iola Mathews (Penguin 1991).

How Does the Media Work? cont...

OFF THE CUFF EXAMPLE

Never say anything you do not want the media to report. And be wary of 'off the cuff' comments – you never know what may come out of your mouth (especially if you're a member of the Royal Family)!

Duke fuse 'joke' sparks new race row

THE Duke of Edinburgh has once again caused controversy after he remarked that a fuse box in a high-tech electronics company looked "as if it was put in by an Indian".

Politicians and race campaigners joined in roundly condemning his comments, which he made during a tour of the Racal-MESL factory near Edinburgh.

Kumar Murshid, chairman of the National Assembly Against Racism, said: "People look up to the Royal Family and expect them to set an example to the public.

"The reality is that they still have considerable influence, so it is absolutely abysmal and disgraceful for him to say such a thing."

The Duke was at the Racal-MESL factory to unveil an award for its rail safety system technology. As he walked around the building, he stopped in a corridor and looked up at the fuse box, which appeared somewhat less sophisticated than other devices in the factory, with electric cables stretching into the ceiling above.

Terry Nisbet, managing director of the company, noticed the

Duke's interest and joked: "That's the national grid."

The Duke replied: "It looks as though it was put in by an Indian."

A spokeswoman for the Commission for Racial Equality described the Duke's comment as 'very unfortunate'. She said: "We look to the Royal Family to be positively promoting racial equality."

However, Dr Shanfi Kauser, secretary of the Islamic Centre in Glasgow, said he was not offended by the Duke's comment. He said: "He is a nice man and I don't think he has done anything out of malice.

"On other occasions he has been very complimentary to us. I think he should be excused."

Buckingham Palace was quick to play down the incident. A spokesman said: "The Duke of Edinburgh regrets any offence which may have been caused by remarks he is reported as making earlier today.

"With hindsight he accepts that what were intended as light-hearted comments were inappropriate."

Working with the Media

How Does the Media Work? cont...

Who's Who in the Media



Working with the Media

How Does the Media Work? cont...

To Whom Do I Address My Media Release?

On a metropolitan newspaper, the chief-of-staff is the person to liaise with. All emails, faxes and media releases (unless otherwise addressed) normally go to the desk of the chief-of-staff. For other media, however, this can vary. On a regional or suburban newspaper, it is usually the chief-of-staff but it could also be the editor. In television, the chief-of-staff or the bureau chief could be the correct person while in radio it is the news editor. Specialty media will vary according to the organisation. For example, at Chieu Duong, the Sydney Vietnamese newspaper, the editor is the correct contact.

The best way to ensure your media release hits the best desk is to begin building a relationship with the media personnel who are important to you. Make a quick phonecall to the organisation before sending your release and ask them for a name and title. You may also find that a media guide may be a wise investment. A media guide contains up-to-date details of all media outlets in Australia. See Appendix 4 for media contacts in your region. Whatever method you use, you will find that a bit of early research could mean the difference between success and failure at appearing in the media.

Working with the Media

Your Needs vs Journalist Needs

“The media is a most powerful resource which is not being properly harnessed. Health workers need to ask themselves: “How, in the context of this drug issue, can the media be useful?”

Steve Vizard, Annual Turning Point Oration 2001

“Media training should be an important part of alcohol and other drug workers’ training... [Most] important is an understanding of the workings of the media.

Knowing one’s rights in respect to the media and how stories are structured is also vital.”

Paul Dillon, Proactive or sensationalist?: the media and harm reduction

Your needs and the needs and expectations of journalists are different. A journalist wants news: information that is going to be interesting, new and different. You want the complexity of your issue transmitted and want to protect your community. You don't

want sensationalism. How on earth can journalists and communities meet in the middle? Once again, understanding the media as a community can help you organise your approach and lead you to making an acceptable compromise.

What Journalists Want

- quick information with a minimum of effort
- a personal angle
- photos or visual images
- to be on page one, or the lead story in a broadcast
- something new, exclusive
- secrets
- scandal, controversy
- new, interesting statistics and research that are simplified for the layperson
- quotable quotes
- new angles
- conflict
- a strong stand on an issue
- specific to drug issues, a quick fix for the drug ‘problem’ (often termed a ‘magic bullet’)

What Communities Want

- to convey a moderate and balanced view
- people not exposed
- their point of view clearly communicated
- to be reported accurately, sensitively and realistically
- to give journalists in-depth information, the whole picture
- to report the good news
- to not have alcohol and drug issues sensationalised
- to have all the ‘should-know’ material published
- not to have information simplified or used out of context

Working with the Media

Your Needs vs Journalist Needs cont...

Communities want the media to report the issues in the way they see them and sometimes forget there will be other people in the community who view the issues differently. They might not see the value of working with the media, assuming their story will be misrepresented or sensationalised. Often the community can feel intimidated by journalists.

Journalists work under intense pressure and are influenced by what the editor wants. Therefore they may use material out of context through no fault of their own. They may only have a couple of hours to research and write a story and don't have time to listen to someone explain an issue in detail for hours. They hate being bothered with non-stories but appreciate being contacted with a strong story. If a story is looking boring they will try to jazz it up. They are likely to be sceptical because they are constantly faced with special interest groups trying to push particular points of view.

So where is the common ground?

Communities can try to give journalists what they want without compromising what's important to them. But they should be prepared to compromise on some of the not-so-important points.

For example:

Accept that the media will not report all the complexities of the issue. Encourage them to report at least part of it.

If they want pictures of people, but you want confidentiality, perhaps a silhouette shot can be used, or the person interviewed anonymously.

Help them research a story by providing information you want published in an easy-to-understand format.

Plan ahead so you are well-prepared to brief a journalist. Have a clear concept of your key message before you speak with her/him.

Working with the Media

Why is that News?

“A newsroom adage is that ‘dog bites man’ is not news, but ‘man bites dog’ is news.”

Ron Perry, *Don't Bury the Lead*

The concept of news has generated as much debate, and paper, as the role of the media. News sense is hard to define, but all journalists have it: an appreciation of what is and isn't news and what is and isn't suitable for publication by their newspaper or magazine, or broadcast by their radio or television station.

As people trying to understand the media community, we need to have this sense also. We need to develop an understanding of what is news and learn to package our information or our message in a way that will make it newsworthy.

Journalists are not interested in whether we are achieving our targets (unless we are the government and even then they'll be more interested if we're not meeting targets!); they may be interested, though, in interviewing New South Wales' 1000th participant in a leading treatment program.

What's the difference? One is statistical, dry and probably boring to people who don't have a direct interest in it. The other has personality, a story of hardship and difficulty overcome, drama, visual possibilities and a greater likelihood of being interesting to the general population.

The more newsworthy your story is, the greater the likelihood of media coverage. Not all stories are (hard) news stories, but all stories have news angles. An angle is the new, different or topical piece of information which makes your event newsworthy. It is the slant placed on the story, on which all the other information hangs.

Angles are subjective and each newspaper, television, or radio show is looking for different angles. Angles will be apparent in the lead or first paragraph of a story or broadcast.

Some things don't become news until you have an angle; we can aid this process by feeding the media. If you are trying to sell a story to the media, take advantage of topical issues, ensure you have an angle and ensure the information is tailored to the particular medium.

For example, the decrease in the number of people who have died from a heroin overdose is news if it can be linked to the launch of a new drug treatment program in your area.

Other examples are:

- The launch of a designated driver program is not usually news but a convicted drink-driving celebrity launching it and announcing they would not have drink-driven if such a program had been in place would certainly receive coverage.
- The Salvation Army distributing food parcels is not new, but getting young people to deliver them and thus gain an understanding of homelessness is.
- A free screening of a film on drug issues is not news, but organising it as part of Drug Action Week is (especially if there is a good picture opportunity).

Working with the Media

Why is that News? cont...

BEWARE! There is a fine line between selling a story and resorting to sensationalism. Remember, journalists will go for the sensational angle.

There is ongoing debate about whether or not people in the drug field should provide newsworthy information at any cost. If a journalist asks you to provide a 'drug user' for an interview, do you comply just to get a mention in the media or to maintain your relationship with the journalist? The answer to this question is in planning. Planning the response before the situation arises will mean you are fully prepared when it does. You must

make sure that you consider the 'ethics' of using real people as case studies. You should get informed consent from people who might be referred to the media to tell their stories. You should also brief them about how best to present their story.

Remember that you can always plan to turn down the journalist's request. This may be a good opportunity to discuss your key message with the journalist and determine whether or not there is another way you can help them with their request, for example, you could provide your organisation's or community's spokesperson for the interview.

Hard, Soft and Colour

Hard news writes itself: strikes, politics, fires, elections, car accidents, court cases, wars, earthquakes, new surveys, studies and research.

Even hard news stories have angles. If the basic facts were communicated in the first edition of the Daily Telegraph, then the paper's coverage in the next edition will have a different angle. For example, the first story might begin: "An earthquake which measured 7 on the Richter scale flattened parts of Los Angeles today." The second edition story might begin: "Eight hundred people lost their lives in the earthquake that hit Los Angeles today." In this case the new angle is the number of people killed because we already know there has been an earthquake.

Soft news is simply news that is not essential. It is a counter to hard news and provides human interest and variety. No one wants a diet of unrelenting conflict and catastrophe.

A good example of soft news is the final story on most television news presentations after the sport and weather. It is here that items like a fashion show to raise money for breast cancer research, or the birth of a rhinoceros at Western Plains Zoo are broadcast.

Newspapers often use good or interesting photographs, especially ones of animals, as the basis for a soft news story. Soft news can also mean new projects, social issues, openings, interesting people and festivals.

Colour is news which is descriptive or more subjective and may contain more feelings, perceptions and background.

Working with the Media

Why is that News? cont...

Differences within the Media

While they all need angles and stories which will interest their viewers, listeners and readers, each medium has different requirements.

Television needs pictures, short interviews, simple information, topical issues, good talent. Its program areas cover news, current affairs, lifestyle, documentary and entertainment.

Radio operates on extremely short deadlines, and presents newsgrabs: short bursts no longer than four or five sentences. You must encapsulate your major points in a few sentences. For the longer interview, you must be clear about the major messages you are trying to convey. It is the easiest medium to access and needs good talent. Listen, ring in offering an alternative view, participate in talkback. Keep in mind specialist programs such as Radio National's Health Report, as well as different audiences, for example reaching young people through Triple J. Don't forget public radio and smaller community radio stations and your ABC radio regional specific programs.

Newspapers will present more in-depth, well-researched information and often drive or lead the other media. You will enhance your opportunities for coverage if you can suggest a good photo. Also consider features pages and special sections.

For example, the launch of a drug management program in local sports clubs may not be newsworthy enough for the front section of the Newcastle Herald, but may be suitable for a health or lifestyle supplement.

Remember letters to the editor, columnists and Sunday papers as alternatives to spread your message.

New media is growing in opportunities at an alarming rate. It includes on-line newspapers, home pages and web links. As mentioned previously, an on-line newspaper is usually initiated by an off-line newspaper and includes the same reports as the off-line newspaper. The on-line newspaper has its own editor, however, and sometimes generates its own stories so it is worthwhile sending a separate media release to the on-line editor. This new medium may be overlooked by many people seeking publicity because of its unknown quality and, therefore, presents itself as a good opportunity for those searching for new publicity ideas.

A website is also a suitable place to self-advertise. Place all your media releases on your home page for a period of time on the off-chance that a journalist may access information from it for a story. Creating web links from other websites to your home page will increase the number of hits and therefore the number of people accessing your information.

Other Media

Magazines are looking for solid information and quotes for feature articles, glossy photographs and/or brief gossipy or "What's Happening" type information. Remember they have much longer lead times than other media, sometimes more than two months in advance.

Suburban and regional and rural newspapers, radio stations, and television stations are often the best way for you to get publicity or provide information to your community. They usually have large audiences and will often use stories that could be ignored by the metropolitan media.

Working with the Media

Why is that News? cont...

A new youth centre in Nimbin probably won't get metropolitan news coverage, but will be of interest to regional media such as The Northern Star. Why? Because the youth centre is more interesting to the Star's readers than to Sydney residents.

Similarly a suburban paper will usually devote more space to local drug issues than a metropolitan outlet because they serve an inner-urban readership who read the local paper to find out what is going on in their neighbourhood. You can take advantage of this by stressing to your local media that your story is news and relevant and of interest to the local community where you live and work.

Specialty media are all forms of media, each of which have a specific audience. This category includes everything from an Aboriginal radio station to a newsletter for health professionals to an Italian community newspaper. It is often an excellent way of getting your message across to a specific target group.

Suburban, regional, rural and specialty media often welcome contributions. They usually have a limited staff – the editor might also be the journalist, sub-editor and photographer – and will sometimes print or report your media release or article verbatim.

The main person to contact on these magazines, newspapers and newsletters is usually the editor but, for other forms of media, this will probably be a different title. It is a good idea, therefore, to contact the media organisation personally so you know exactly who the best contact is. Tell the contact about your organisation and ask them what sort of stories they are looking for. They will usually appreciate a more personal relationship with you.

Local media organisations and specialty media often rely on people telling them what is happening in their community or amongst their audience. Ensure they are on your mailing list.

S U M M A R Y

If you want media coverage you must have an understanding of news and angles. Information should be tailored to different media organisations and for different sections or programs within them. Make it your business to find out what the media are looking for.

Working with the Media

Getting to Know You: Working with Journalists

“There’s no such thing as a free lunch.”

Ancient Proverb

Throughout this resource, we have mentioned that building a relationship with a journalist can help to have your story placed. The importance of relationship-building in the media cannot be stressed enough. It will ensure your media releases are landing on the right desks and that your information is relevant to the journalist to whom it is sent. Ultimately, it will ensure that your key messages are conveyed to your target groups.

Don’t forget that journalists themselves appreciate knowing good contacts that they can call on for information or quotes. Make a list of all media contacts who would cover drug related information in your community (see Appendix 2 for media contact list example). Contact each one to introduce yourself and your organisation or group (see Appendix 3 for introductory letter example). Discuss with them your role and key messages and how your information can be useful to the journalist. If you are representing an organisation, discuss your organisation’s function. Find out what the journalist is looking for and how you can be useful to them. Record all this information so it is at your fingertips but remember also to update it regularly (for example, once every quarter), as media personnel change roles regularly. Try to become included in journalists’ contact books.

Many stories have been written or broadcast because a media professional is personally concerned with an issue in some way.

Journalists are people who bring their views, values, experiences and relationships with them to the job. If you have a good, constructive relationship with journalists this will greatly increase the chance of your issues being reported and being reported correctly. It doesn’t necessarily mean taking journalists to lunch.

Do

- work quickly
- get back to them when you say you will
- respect their deadlines
- react, participate in debate
- get to know individual journalists
- make yourself available for comment or know who to refer them to
- find out who else they are talking to
- use quotable quotes
- educate journalists about your point of view
- give them accurate information
- suggest stories, publicise your activities, identify new angles and media opportunities
- make liaison with journalists a part of your overall public relations strategy
- be as helpful as possible
- if relevant, know your organisation
- know your subject
- be clear about who should talk to the media in your organisation or community group
- make sure you know and meet their technical requirements

Don’t

- be afraid to steer them in another direction
- be afraid to take time to think about a response
- repeat ‘facts’ second-hand (check the accuracy of your sources)
- try to slant the facts or tell only half the story
- give false information or lie
- expect photos to be returned

Working with the Media

Working with Journalists cont...

- take a friendly journalist for granted
- think your refusal to respond will kill a negative story
- use technical language
- provide lengthy research reports without summaries of key points
- criticise small mistakes
- say anything you don't want reported

Finally, follow up any coverage with the journalist. Thank them for positive coverage and discuss with them any problems or negative issues so they can be better informed next time. It will also help that journalist to remember you, your organisation and your organisation's key messages.

Working with the Media

Be Proactive, Not Reactive

“Media publicity does not just happen. It is made to happen. Journalists either create the news or someone makes sure they know about an event or issue.”

“In this daily process, it is your news the media seek to report. They are relying on your information, expertise, comment, activities or predicament to do their job.”

Marion Hudson, *The Media Game*

Many organisations wait for journalists to come to them with questions before they do anything with the media. This is called being reactive. It is difficult to present the good news when a journalist is on the phone asking you about money raised for a new youth drug education program, when that program is behind on its starting date.

Being proactive means anticipating the media, initiating media coverage and actively working with journalists to have information presented the way you want. If you are proactive, you can even turn disasters into minor inconveniences. Better still, you can create many opportunities for positive, constructive media coverage. Remember, journalists are constantly looking for new ideas.

Start by having a public relations strategy and a media policy in place, as described in this resource at page 32. Designate one or more media spokespeople who are informed about drug issues and give them comprehensive media training so they are prepared. Provide your spokespeople with a list of general points to cover when they are speaking to the media.

Handling the Media Inquiry

When you have to be reactive, there are ways of dealing with journalists which help reduce potential damage.

1. Ensure your media spokespeople are fully briefed to handle all media inquiries. If the journalist talks to a person who is not designated as a spokesperson they may print or broadcast their comments anyway.

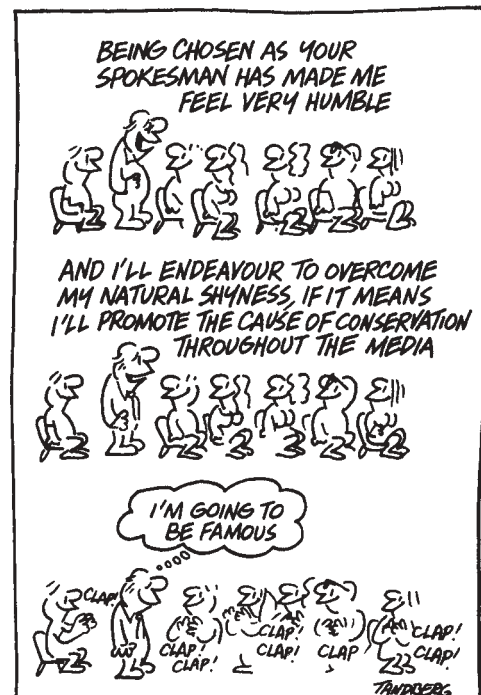


Illustration by Ron Tandberg courtesy of *How to Use the Media in Australia* by Iola Mathews (Penguin 1991).

Working with the Media

Be Proactive, Not Reactive cont...

2. Find out the caller's name and organisation and as much as possible about the story she or he is working on. Then tell the reporter you are currently tied up and will get back to her/him shortly (clarify an exact time and stick to this deadline). This gives you time to prepare a response.
 3. Depending on the request, your response could include:
 - Providing factual information – e.g. what are the health effects of substance misuse?
 - Recommending other experts and/or organisations – e.g. for a story about methadone, providing the name and number of the best person to talk to.
 - Explaining your point of view – e.g. expelling students for experimenting with marijuana is not the only option open to schools.
 - Promoting your project, product or service – e.g. one way communities can act on drug problems in their area is to become involved in a community information forum.
- Suggesting a person from your community be interviewed – e.g. if they're doing a story on older people and cannabis use, why not interview someone you know has expertise on this subject?
 - Discussing alternative angles or approaches – e.g. rather than a story on an alcoholic going through the AA program, why not look at the issue of prevention and how to act safely when drinking?
 - Suggesting the story is dropped – e.g. stories about inhalants and new designer drugs may have the unintended effect of encouraging people to try these drugs by arousing curiosity.

Seize the Moment

One of the easiest ways to be proactive is to comment on an issue which is already in the media. For example, if several students have been expelled from a school for using drugs, you can send a media release, a statement or a letter to the editor on the issue. This is a much easier way of getting media attention than initiating a story in isolation. Learn to be opportunistic.

S U M M A R Y

She or he who hesitates is lost or, worse still, out of step with the media community. With so many groups and issues vying for attention you cannot afford to simply react when called upon. Create opportunities for media coverage by issuing statements on stories already in the news.

Working with the Media

Be Proactive, Not Reactive cont...

PROACTIVE EXAMPLE

With the debate about federal, state and local government drug policies and the involvement of local communities raging in the Sydney and Melbourne media, the Australian Drug Foundation decided to take the initiative. The Foundation's CEO Bill Stronach wrote an opinion editorial piece and sent it in to the Herald Sun in Melbourne. The article was printed the next day and, along with it, a health perspective, rather than a criminal perspective, on heroin use.

A common problem



Let's fight the common enemy, not each other, says **BILL STRONACH**

THERE are no easy answers to the drug problem. There are people who care and others who don't give a damn.

There is no single policy or strategy that will solve the problem, and there is no single social, ethnic, religious or socio-economic group immune from drug-related harm.

Drug use is complex; the perceived benefits of drug use to the user must be set against the significant risks and harms that can result.

Management of our legal and illegal drug use is very complex — the solutions are not simple.

Recent media terminology confuses the issue. There are no "devils incarnate" on either side of the divisive debate.

Those who "care too much" do not just inhabit the side that opposes supervised injecting facilities.

People are not "in a state of denial" by supporting or opposing one side or the other.

It is a terribly confused and polarised debate.

It seems that drugs do that to ordinary citizens.

As the heroin death toll has exceeded 1000 over the past four years, it is timely to draw breath and reframe the debate. Time to reconsider the concepts used and the language employed when we talk about the problem.

It is our debate for our community's sake.



Of course, the effects of drug misuse create major challenges for a community, but so do unemployment, homelessness, financial deprivation and mental illness.

In these areas we don't generally talk in terms of wars, enemies, victories.

Rather, we talk in terms of working together, harnessing government policy for the common good, of uniting the community to work to a common goal.

SOCIAL cohesion and problem management are only strengthened by connecting all citizens to meaningful social and personal support structures. The family is crucial.

We can reframe the debate by accepting the common features that underpin the polarised extremes.

As a community, we seem to agree on many aspects of the drug problem such as the need for better treatment, improved law enforcement and

effective drug education.

It is a commendable strength, not an ill-informed weakness, to accept and acknowledge the opposing views that have legitimate merit.

And this may be the starting point — even the healing point.

It is pertinent to compare two health issues — cancer and drug addiction.

Trise, one may be seen as self-inflicted and the other seen as an unsought tragedy.

But do we refuse treatment to the lifetime smoker who knew the dangers and now faces last-stage emphysema? Or to the speeding drivers who injure themselves?

Do we turn away the would-be bandit who is wounded in a failed hold-up?

These are all health matters requiring health interventions, and the patient deserves the best treatment available — mainstream, alternative, or as part of a clinical trial.

Perhaps the barometer of a community's health is how it

takes care of those with health problems.

For both cancer and addiction we provide treatment regimens, in hospital and at home. The bottom line should be that anything with proven efficacy is valid.

Without wanting to imbue the scientific and medical community with an inflated role, any treatment that enhances or maintains life should be legitimate.

For some, that may be prescribed heroin. This is not a call for legalising all drugs, or for making heroin available from the corner store.

Rather, it may be a means to ensure that medical treatment is sustained for those with severe and chronic dependence. Supervised injecting rooms may have a small place, too.

THIS is not suggesting a drug user's paradise, but rather a safer environment for everyone, and a conduit to treatment so that addiction can be beaten.

It won't work for everyone. That's why we need a range of initiatives.

In Australia we have particular drug problems, particular patterns of use, a culture that (usually) cares for most people, and a tradition of ingenuity and creativity. We'll give things a go.

It's a big ask, but perhaps the key step to managing the drug problem is acknowledging that, at the end of the day, nearly everyone seeks the same thing — greater personal and public safety.

The challenge is for those fervently opposed to new strategies and those as fervently in favor, and all those who are still wrestling with the issue, to move forward together and save lives.

In Francis Bacon's words, "He that will not apply new remedies must expect new evils".

BILL STRONACH is CEO of the Australian Drug Foundation.

Working with the Media

Plan, Plan, Plan

“Much of the drug information in the media today is a mish-mash, some worthy, some desirable, but what is missing is a simple message which would provide unity among the confusion.”

Steve Vizard, Annual Turning Point Oration 2001

“It is much harder to sensationalise a set of facts if you have extensive and detailed background information.”

Julianne Schultz, Accuracy in Australian Newspapers

The importance of planning cannot be overestimated. If you know what you want to say and to whom, you are much more likely to be successful in your dealings with the media. Planning eliminates the hit and miss approach and you are more likely to get your message across to the people you want to reach, without having the issue sensationalised. Publicity for its own sake may have no value to your issue, community or organisation. Planning puts you on the front foot.

All publicity planning should be part of a long-term public relations plan (see page 30-32) and feed into your media plan. At a minimum, you need to determine your objectives, target groups, public relations strategy (which includes your key messages), tactics, and an evaluation or review process. Your tactics (or activities) will fit into a timeline which can extend over any period of time: six months to a year or two or five years. Of course, this plan will be flexible and will change according to occurrences over the time period but it will ensure you have an ability to clearly see what you want to communicate and what you will do to communicate with your target groups.

Once you have a public relations plan, you can quickly draw up a plan for an individual publicity activity. The following publicity planning model will help you work out your actions for a particular event or campaign long before the first journalist contacts you.

- **Issue/event/campaign**
This could be one specific event or a series of events under the one campaign.
- **Background**
A description of the issue and its context. The more information you provide here, the easier it will be to understand where you have come from and where you are going.
- **Summary of plan**
A short statement summarising the plan.
- **Aim**
State what change in attitude/behaviour you are trying to achieve. What is your goal? Also relate how this event/campaign fits into the strategic plan of your organisation or group.
- **Objectives**
How many and what type of media items you expect.
- **Angles**
What is newsworthy? How will you capture the media's attention?
- **Key messages**
The one, two or three most important points you wish to convey to your target groups through the media.
- **Target groups**
Who you want your message to reach. You may have a number of target groups but be as specific as possible as to who these groups are.

Working with the Media

Plan, Plan, Plan cont...

- **Tactics**

Include this section if you are planning a whole campaign, rather than a single event. This is a list of all the activities you will run as part of the campaign.

- **Media tactics**

Which media you will aim for and what methods you will use. Keep in mind your target groups because you want to select the media which is most likely to reach your target group, for example, Triple J will reach young people or your local community radio station might have target group specific programs, eg. for parents.

- **Spokespeople**

A list of spokespeople and areas of expertise. Try to use as few spokespeople as possible to avoid confusion of your key messages. You might want to make links with other experts or spokespeople in your community.

- **Timeline**

A projection of the tasks to be undertaken to complete the event or campaign and when they need to be completed by.

- **Debrief (Evaluation and/or review)**

A statement of how you will review the initiative following its implementation, eg. discuss what worked, did not work or could be improved.

Consider all proposals to initiate media coverage in light of the following criteria:

- will the media be interested?
- does it fit into the organisation's or group's strategic plan?
- does it contribute to the positioning of the agency or issue?
- are there potential negative consequences?
- is it possible given existing commitments and time constraints?

As the publicity unfolds, you may need to stop and revise the plan. For example, the story may change or be covered in an unexpected way. What you expected to be one or two low key radio interviews may blow out into a statewide media story.

You will also need to review or evaluate your contact with the media after the event has passed. You can look at the media coverage you received and include copies of published articles. This is useful to refer to for examples of media releases, campaigns or launches which were successful in gaining publicity.

This will complete your publicity plan and your plan will become an activity report to look back at and use as a benchmark for future plans.

101 Ideas (or nearly) for Publicity

- Make your launch real and human by having a speaker who has been personally affected by your topic. The speaker will talk about their own experiences in relation to the topic. (Be careful, however, of sensationalism and personal privacy.)
- An exhibition or open day to highlight the new program you wish to publicise but also showing the full range of services provided.
- Have a prominent member of parliament or community leader open or speak at your event.
- A competition where young people come up with a slogan, logo or design for your topic.
- A 'Sale of the Century' type quiz show with celebrities, using questions about the topic being publicised.

Working with the Media

Plan, Plan, Plan cont...

PLANNING EXAMPLE

Issue/event/activity/campaign

A campaign aiming to alert the community to the work of the newly formed Mudgee Drug Action Team.

Background

With the formation of the Mudgee Drug Action Team (MDAT), an initiative was required to make a mark in the Mudgee and Gulgong communities. MDAT needed to develop a campaign which would alert the local community to the formation of MDAT, which would promote the aims of the Team, and publicise the services and programs it had to offer community members. The initiative would show the community how it would benefit from MDAT's presence.

Summary of Plan

A campaign was developed, using Drug Action Week as the launch pad, to publicise MDAT and its benefit to the Mudgee and Gulgong communities. Three main activities formed the basis of this campaign: a function for young people, a film night and a drug awareness competition.

Aim

To promote the work of the MDAT.

To gain the Mudgee and Gulgong communities' support of MDAT initiatives.

To demonstrate how the Team is of benefit to the local community.

To raise awareness of drug issues in the Mudgee and Gulgong communities.

Objectives

To obtain coverage from the press, radio and television media in the region.

Angles

All community members are affected by drug use.

Key Messages

MDAT is raising awareness of drug issues in the community.

Talking about drug issues can stop young Mudgee and Gulgong people from being adversely affected by drugs.

The community can become involved to actively reduce the harm caused by drugs.

Target Groups

1. Young people, aged between 14 and 20, from the Mudgee and Gulgong communities.
2. Parents of the above group.
3. Teachers of the first group.
4. Appropriate media professionals from the Mudgee Guardian, Radio 2MG and WIN TV.

Tactics

1. Hold a function for school students at the local Youth Cafe, at which young people from the Teen Challenge drug rehabilitation program will speak.
2. A film night, screening 'Loser', for local young people and their parents.
3. A writing and free expression competition encouraging young people to present their views on drug issues in any format.

Media Tactics

1. Send a media release to the Mudgee Guardian for each of the tactics.
2. Contact the Mudgee Guardian chief-of-staff to introduce the Team and its aims.
3. Send a media release to Radio 2MG for each of the tactics.

Working with the Media

Plan, Plan, Plan cont...

4. Send a media release to WIN TV for each of the tactics.

Spokespeople

Team Leader of the Mudgee Drug Action Team

Debrief (Evaluation or Review) (compiled after campaign has finished)

Mudgee Guardian – full front page introducing MDAT and its programs; plus an article highlighting the need for drug awareness, with MDAT quotes.

Radio 2MG – 20 minute interview on the 'Midday' program.

WIN TV – 2 separate news stories on MDAT: one on the Youth Cafe function and one on the film night.

MDAT's aims were met as demonstrated by the fact that the local community was prompted to talk and think about drug issues.

Many people have approached team members in the street to ask about MDAT, parents have thanked MDAT for the message it is giving their children, and individuals and community organisations are volunteering help and offering ideas.

The competition has received over \$2000 worth of prizes donated from local businesses thus demonstrating dedicated community support for MDAT. Encouragement has also come from all local primary and high schools.

Planning a Media Policy

While you are planning your publicity, spare a few hours to put together a media policy for your organisation. It will be time well-spent if you later find journalists knocking at your door.

A media policy is a clear set of instructions detailing what to do when a media professional contacts your organisation or group. It can therefore be used by every member of your organisation.

To put one together, you firstly need to identify spokespeople. These people are the only people who should speak with the media on behalf of the organisation or group. There may only be one spokesperson for the whole organisation or a number of spokespeople,

each one covering a different topic. The spokespeople need to know that they are designated spokespeople and need to be media savvy. When writing the policy, be as detailed as possible so those who have first contact with the journalist will know exactly what to do. You may even want to prescribe exactly what they should say. (Hint: once you do get a media call, let all staff know what the spokesperson said so that everybody is aware of what is going on at every step.)

Print the policy on a small piece of paper or card and even laminate it so it is easily located and used.

Working with the Media

Plan, Plan, Plan cont...

Further Media Policy Possibilities

Your media policy could include referring a journalist to someone else on certain issues. For example, a journalist calls you for a comment about statistics on amphetamine use. Your media policy dictates to you that you should contact Agency ABC in your community who you know can access the relevant statistics and speak on this topic. This ensures the media is getting the most informed response as quickly as possible.

In planning your policy, it would be useful to build these kinds of referral relationships with others in your community who are also addressing local drug issues. Set up a list of people in your region who are available and have agreed to comment in the media on their area of experience and expertise. Regularly update the list. Again, this will be a great way to meet the needs of the media seeking stories, comment, interviews or background while ensuring that the most accurate information is delivered. A referral system will allow you to

handle any inquiry by passing it on, even when you have chosen not to talk to the media at all.

You could also develop 'frequently asked questions' information on the approach to drug-related issues in your region. Perhaps collaborate with others in your community. This will prepare you for a discussion with the media or you can provide this to other members of your community who are working with the media. The answers may also help you to discuss the current approach to drug-related issues and the purpose of your activity. The information sheet could outline some broad statements about approach, principles, what you do or what your community is doing as a whole, how much money is being spent on this approach, and why and how this is important to your community. If everyone is presenting the same overall messages, you can ensure that information going out to the community is consistent.

Working with the Media

Plan, Plan, Plan cont...

MEDIA POLICY EXAMPLE

Australian Drug Foundation (ADF) Media Policy

Reactive

Media call comes in to reception.

Reception transfers immediately to Communications Manager.

Communications Manager available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Communications Manager decides whether the ADF will comment and nominate a time to respond back to the journalist.

Communications Manager selects appropriate spokesperson from 4 key senior ADF staff, who have all been media trained. As the ADF Communications Manager also acts as a general referral service, sometimes the call will be passed onto outside agency for relevant expertise e.g, Paul Dillon from National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre when call is about ecstasy use.

Communications Manager works with senior staff member to develop 3 key messages and arranges for response back to journalist.

All ADF staff notified that a comment has been made to the media.

Proactive

Communications Manager works up a publicity plan as per ADF Communications Strategy.

Communications Manager drafts media release and refines with key senior ADF staff.

A launch event is organised as per planning suggestions contained in this resource.

The media release is distributed via an electronic delivery service to ensure instant national coverage.

All ADF staff are issued with the media release and front desk is briefed on how to handle calls.

Communications Manager captures all incoming calls and arranges for response with the ADF spokesperson.

Working with the Media

Launch Yourself into Media Space

We've all seen media conferences, speeches, launches and openings on television and in newspapers. The number of journalists attending, and the presence of tape recorders and cameras can be off-putting and nerve-racking. Sometimes our message can get lost. Around the world, people will talk about the comments boxer Anthony Mundine made about the September 11 incidents but no-one remembers the reason why he was appearing on national television (he had successfully defended his IBF title with a knock-out the day before the interview).

There are ways we can make sure media attention is focussed where we want it to be.

So, you have planned and designed an event, you know it has an angle and is newsworthy, you have good speakers, you have facts at your fingertips. Now what?

Before

- Make sure you have a plan. What are your aims? What are you trying to say? Do you have a newsworthy angle? Who is your major spokesperson? What visual material do you have for newspaper photographers and television?
 - Make sure you know your local media's requirements and deadlines. Knowing these practical things can make a difference to getting someone to your event or getting your event covered in the media. Your local media may also have different requirements to each other.
 - Launches are best held about mid-morning and earlier in the week is better than later. Sunday launches can be a good way of getting into Monday's papers and setting the agenda for the week.
- Be aware of other related issues running in the media that may impact upon your story.
 - Give journalists copies of speeches in advance.
 - Send a media notification in advance. This will be sent sometimes one week before, sometimes six weeks before, depending on the media organisation's and the journalist's preference (check with them first). The notification should include a few paragraphs about the event plus all the details of time, date and venue (there is an example in the chapter 'The Media Kit'). It's also a good idea to mention potential visuals to interest photographers or camerapeople. Do a quick ring-around after sending the notification to ensure everyone received it.
 - On the day before the event, follow up by phone to check the media have got your event in their diary and whether they need any more information. Ask for the chief-of-staff or news editor if you haven't already got a contact. Also ring the rounds reporter if there is one.
 - Brief your spokespeople before the event and run through some of the questions the media might ask them.
 - Ensure you have a media kit (see the chapter, 'The Media Kit', for details). This should include a media release, relevant background material and a contact point for further information. It is also a good idea to have a running sheet for the event to keep everybody on time and aware of the schedule of events.

SUMMARY

Thoroughly plan your media event, ensure you have an angle, prepare information material, make sure you time it for deadlines, be as helpful as possible to journalists and evaluate later.

Working with the Media

Launch Yourself into Media Space cont...

- Try to ensure you have your logo on a banner or other signage behind the speakers (and in front, and anywhere a camera can catch sight of it).
- Make it colourful for television and colour photos.
- Remember journalists are always in a hurry! Keep the speeches short and succinct and keep number of speakers to a minimum.
- Don't forget the media which don't have a hard news focus, such as morning television, chat shows, magazines, different sections of a paper and specialty media. They will generally want a different angle, sometimes with more background and colour.
- If it's a good story, be prepared to talk it up. If it's not, don't beat it up or you risk damaging your relationship with the media.

During

- Introduce yourself to journalists, be friendly, look after them, make sure they get a media kit.
- Reserve seats at the front for journalists and ensure they are near exits if possible.
- Make telephones available.
- If only a photographer attends, give her or him the media kit.
- Help the media by arranging interviews and answering questions.

After

- Make sure you send the media release by fax or email to the media who don't attend the launch. Radio stations are often too busy to attend but will sometimes do an interview over the phone.
- Check with the journalists who did attend to see if they need any more information.
- Evaluate the event: find out what worked and what didn't work, and think about how to do it better next time. Write this into your publicity plan, as your plan will then become an activity report.

And Remember

Your event will be competing with many others. Unless you make it interesting, newsworthy and different, your invitation may end up where the majority of them go – in the chief-of-staff's rubbish bin.

Despite all your best efforts, your event may unfortunately coincide with a more newsworthy event, for example, the Prime Minister may happen to choose your day to announce her/his retirement.

You cannot foresee this. All you can do is have a solid 'Plan B' to be used in emergencies.

This may include sending to journalists your own succinct report on your event in the hope it will still be newsworthy for them to use, perhaps adding a good photo.

It may also include re-releasing the information at another date if it is still relevant later. For example, a launch of a 'Safe Schoolies' pack may have occurred in November but the information about the pack would still be relevant to journalists during Schoolies Week in December.

S U M M A R Y

Thoroughly plan your media event, ensure you have an angle, prepare information material, make sure you time it for deadlines, be as helpful as possible to journalists and evaluate later.

Working with the Media

Gobbledegook Explained

“You may speak one language with your ... contacts but you must translate this into the language of everyday.”

Mandy Oakham, *Don't Bury the Lead*

“Jargon: The language peculiar to a trade, profession, or other group. Unintelligible or meaningless talk or writing; gibberish.”

The Macquarie Dictionary

Jargon is a convenient form of shorthand which is understood within the drug and alcohol field. Outside this field it is meaningless and needs to be avoided in any dealings with the media.

To increase the chances of being reported, and reported correctly, use plain English. If technical words are necessary make sure you explain them, but it is best to avoid them altogether.

It is also a good idea to eliminate bureaucratic language or 'officialese', a mysterious language which uses three words when one will do, makes nouns into verbs and uses long words when short ones will do. Use simple words at every opportunity. It is important in the drug and alcohol field, however, to make

use of a small number of positive key words that are most commonly used in the field.

Some terms carry negative connotations for the drug and alcohol field and should be eliminated from your conversations with the media. For example, the 'war' on drugs or 'fight against drugs', 'junkies' (use 'drug users'), and 'shooting gallery' (try injecting facility).

Try and work with others in your community to ensure you are using consistent, sensitive and simple language when talking to the media about drug issues.

Here are some other examples of health-speak and their plain English equivalents.

Health-Speak

Early intervention is the most effective way to help a drug user.

Harm reduction is a public health policy which has the potential to minimise drug misuse in Australia.

Our goal with young people is to delay the onset of smoking.

Plain English

Doing something about a drug problem early is the best way to help a drug user.

We need to understand that drug use has been a part of our culture for a long time. We probably can't get rid of it completely but we can do things that may stop someone starting or help someone who has a drug problem.

Our campaign aims to put off the time children start smoking for as long as possible.

Working with the Media

Gobbledegook Explained cont...

Health-Speak

Many local agencies are committed to helping groups of people develop skills to tackle the issues they see as problems.

Fighting planned changes to doctors' duties requires action at all levels.

An intersectoral approach was necessary to deal with Australia's substance abuse problems.

Alcohol and drug agencies have had a series of consultations to produce a new range of drug education resources.

Plain English

Many local agencies are committed to community development.

Fighting planned changes to general practitioners' duties requires system-wide action.

Action involving doctors, GPs and pharmacists, as well as the police, welfare and legal systems, was needed to deal with Australia's alcohol and drug problems.

Alcohol and drug agencies have held meetings to produce a new range of drug education videos and pamphlets.

Officialese

utilise
at this point in time
eventuate
facilitate
demonstrate
optimise
give consideration to
make provision
make application

Also avoid using acronyms such as CDAT (Community Drug Action Team), NGO (non-government organisation), BAC (Blood Alcohol Content) or IDU (injecting drug users).

Finally, if your writing resembles this, start again!

Plain English

use
now
happen
help
show
improve
consider
provide
apply

Using baseline data, researchers at the University of Sydney have ascertained that a multi-disciplinary approach can impact positively on relapse prevention counselling for clients with a substance dependency who attend rehabs and detoxs.

SUMMARY

Not everyone, especially journalists, understands your jargon. When you are dealing with the media use simple, clear language.

Working with the Media

The Media Release and Other Methods for Reaching the Media

More than anything else, the writing of a media release requires you to place yourself in the journalist's shoes. If you don't think like journalists, or at least try to, your media release may not end up in the paper, on the radio or on television, but in the rubbish bin. As the media release is often the first contact between you and the media, it is important to get it right.

This means:

- Thinking about news and angles. Is it interesting? Does it have an angle which is different, innovative or unusual? Remember you are competing with thousands of other events, issues and organisations. Journalists soon get sick of the humdrum.
 - Write it like a journalist would write a story. Write a headline which demands attention. For example, rather than 'Program leads to significant reduction in drug use' try 'Drug use cut by half'. Start with the most interesting, exciting or provocative piece of information. The second paragraph should amplify the first, and successive paragraphs should be written in descending order of importance. A warning: don't make sweeping comments without backing them up with strong arguments. Refer to facts or studies if necessary. If you have a guest speaker don't just name her or him; say something interesting about them. Some people generate interest because of their name alone but the majority don't.
 - Ensure you answer these questions: who, what, why, where and when. These details are essential. Journalists do not want to ring you up to find out where the launch is because you forgot to put it on the media release.
 - Include quotable quotes. Most stories quote people; this gives the story a sense of immediacy. If your media release is competing with someone else's, the presence or absence of quotable quotes may be the deciding factor. Make sure you have spokespeople who are ready to comment on the media release at any time.
- At the end of the release, always include your name and contact phone numbers (especially mobile) so the journalist can contact someone for further information at all times.
 - Keep it short. The ideal media release should be no longer than a page and certainly no more than two. Remember journalists are constantly racing against time.
 - Make sure there are no spelling or punctuation errors and have someone else check the release for accuracy. Check all names are spelt correctly.
 - Avoid jargon.
 - If necessary, explain briefly your role and/or include a page of background information (but only if necessary!).
 - Space the release well and try to make it look official, yet attractive.
 - Make sure you email or fax the release to the right person: chief-of-staff, news editor, editor or the rounds reporter.
 - Think about following up media releases which get published with other angles or stories. If your media release doesn't get a run, you may be able to rewrite it as a letter to the editor.
 - If your release is not published, don't be discouraged. Try to find out why, then try again.

Working with the Media

The Media Release and Other Methods for Reaching the Media cont...

How to Send It

Always keep reporters' deadlines in mind; if you are unsure of these, contact the media outlet and ask someone in the newsroom about the best time to send your release. Timing is all important. If, for example, you are issuing a media release about an issue already in the news and are hoping to attract coverage in that day's radio bulletins or the next day's paper, your media release must be sent as quickly as possible, either by email or fax.

Develop media lists with names, contact details and the best form of contact (do you send it by email or fax?). Remember to update the lists regularly as media personnel change positions constantly. See appendix 2 for a media contact list example and appendix 4 for contacts in your region.

Another option worth considering for large-scale releases is a commercial distribution service which will, for a fee, send your release to any number of media outlets throughout Australia.

Daily newspapers and television news programs prefer to receive your media release in the morning to allow them sufficient time to put together a story. Weekends are usually quiet news times and offer good opportunities to promote softer stories. Similarly, the month of January is usually short on hard news and the media is interested in providing readers with lighter material.

Sections within the paper, such as the lifestyle, travel or education section, may only appear weekly and therefore have longer lead times. This is also the case for special interest television programs and magazines which may work months in advance. In these instances, you may choose to post your release.

See the chapter on 'The Media Kit' for an example of a media release.

Pictures

One picture is worth a thousand words.

Ancient Proverb

Newspapers and magazines include graphics, cartoons, drawings and photographs to make stories more interesting. Many stories' 'news-worthiness' greatly increases if illustrated with a good picture.

You can trigger an editor or reporter's interest in your story and increase your chance of having it published by providing pictures or drawing attention to a photo opportunity. The newspaper may use your picture or may send a photographer.

For example, a story about a restored merry-go-round would normally barely rate a mention. But imagine two photos side-by-side: one is of a great-grandmother sitting on one of the horses; the other is of the same person

sitting on exactly the same horse, but 80 years ago. This is a photo opportunity that can (and did) reach page 9 of a major metropolitan newspaper.

Photos you send in must be good quality and of a professional standard.

Other points to keep in mind:

- They should normally be black and white with a gloss finish.
- Clearly label the back of the photo with the names of people in it, their titles and the organisation/s they represent (don't forget correct spelling).
- Photos are rarely returned.
- Send new photos of people regularly quoted in the media every couple of years or when their appearance changes (new hairstyle, moustache).

Working with the Media

The Media Release and Other Methods for Reaching the Media cont...

- Other pictures, or visuals, are also of interest to the editor, for example, graphs and simple tables of statistics.
- Some organisations prefer to receive their pictures in electronic format so find out if this is preferable and, if so, the precise details of that format (pdf or jpeg? emailed or on disk?).

Op Ed and Letters to the Editor

Most newspapers publish an 'op ed' (or opinion editorial) page. If the newspaper has an editorial page, it is usually the page opposite the editorial. This section of the paper usually carries a couple of articles from regular columnists and an in-depth feature about a current issue. The op ed page also publishes short, well-written articles by people in the community. You can offer to write an article by contacting the features editor with your idea. Remember the standard of work on this page is very high.

Writing a letter to the editor is one way of controlling the presentation of your message.

The letters page is read widely by both the public and by journalists who see it as a source of potential stories.

Remember the letters page is considered mainly as an opportunity for the 'ordinary person' to express a point of view, not just another vehicle for companies (who can afford to buy space) or special interest groups (who often merit coverage in the news pages). Letters from organisations will, however, be published in many circumstances. You could encourage others in your community to get involved in writing a letter to the paper.

Letters are a good way of presenting an opinion on an issue already in the media. They must be sent quickly, preferably by email

or fax, and should arrive early in the day to be considered for publication.

Letters should be short and to the point. They will have more chance of being used if the tone is dramatic, ironic, humorous, satirical or in some way striking. But they should not be silly or use fictitious names.

The letters editor receives many letters every day so the opening paragraph should be worded in a way which grabs attention. The closing paragraph is an opportunity to leave the reader with a final, salient point.

Keep in mind, however, that smaller newspapers and occasional regional and rural newspapers may not have an editorial, an op ed or letters to the editor or may carry only some of them.



Illustration by Ron Tandberg courtesy of *How to Use the Media in Australia* by Iola Mathews (Penguin 1991).

SUMMARY

The best letters are short, sharp and topical. Media releases should be written in the same way a journalist writes a story. Be aware of deadlines and remember to point out photo opportunities.

Working with the Media

The Media Release and Other Methods for Reaching the Media cont...

LETTER TO THE EDITOR EXAMPLE

Sydney man, Tony Trimmingham, sent a letter to the editor about the need for a change in approach to the heroin issue, after his son died from an overdose. The letter was printed as an opinion piece in the Sydney Morning Herald and sparked so much media interest that Tony has now become a community leader and a spokesperson for families affected by heroin.

Heroin statistic was my son

On February 24, 23-year-old Damien Trimmingham died in the car park of St Margaret's Hospital, Surry Hills. He lay dead in the morgue at Glebe for three days before his family were notified by telephone of his death.

A needle was still in his arm – he had been drinking heavily through the day. Another drug-ridden no-hoper using taxpayers' money to fund a sordid habit that ended his life suddenly. For the police and mortuary workers, he was just another statistic. Twenty years ago, this incident would have been headlines in the newspaper – now it was just one of many similar deaths.

Five days later, more than 300 people met at St Stephen's Church, Willoughby to say goodbye to someone they loved. Without exception, they spoke of a fine young man with qualities such as cheerfulness, courtesy, courage, leadership and caring. They spoke of his sporting achievements – State champion athlete in several disciplines, champion rugby union and league player with potential for international representation. They spoke of his acting and musical talent and his poetry and his ability to reach and touch his friends with deep-seated love. They sobbed, they got angry, they

RELATIONS

TONY TRIMMINGHAM

talked of it being “a good funeral”.

Damien was my son. I loved him deeply and I miss him terribly. His death was an accident, the result of deadly experimentation at a time when he was in despair. He had recently lost his long-term relationship and his job of 3 1/2 years. Having read his personal papers, I've discovered his dark, despairing side hidden from most but fed by fantasy and black lyrics from so-called 'heroes' of this generation's music. Damien's poetry is very talented, but it reflects a hopelessness that is at the core of this generation.

I also believe that, with maturity and some success, which Damien, with his talents and qualities was bound to achieve, he would have survived. He was occasionally using heroin but was not an addict; it was his escape from his despair. Everyone who works at the coal face – police, mortuary workers, social workers and counsellors – tell me that Damien should not and need not have died. They tell me that half the crime in Australia could disappear overnight. How? Their solution – full legalisation and

decriminalisation of heroin use, with government and health workers totally controlling its use and output.

Since Damien died, I have learnt a great deal about the drug culture and trade. As tragic as his death has been, his death is not the greatest tragedy. I have discovered that as many as 30 per cent of young people have experimented, or are experimenting with heroin. All drug education has failed miserably.

The scum who grow rich on the deaths of this generation are allowed to go free to feed on the despair, fantasies and rebelliousness of our young people. The police didn't even want to know the name of Damien's dealer, saying they were powerless to touch him.

If someone with great courage doesn't take a risk to make radical changes, in 10 years the cost on this generation will be immense. If the public doesn't stop seeing drug addicts as a separate society deserving no sympathy or help, then their children and friends will be next victims.

My plea, in the name of my son, Damien, who was always a leader, is to listen to Justice Wood and the Rev Bill Crews and all the men and women who pick up dead children from the streets, and try something new.

Working with the Media

The Media Kit

The media kit is usually assembled and handed out to the media at a particular publicity event. It provides all the information that the media needs about that event, including vital contact details, statistics, and even occasional photos. All the information is placed in a paper folder so that journalists can take it as a pack.

At a minimum, the kit will include (usually with the notification or the release at the front):

- A media notification (or media alert).
- A media release.
- A backgrounder.
- Biographies of speakers.
- A fact sheet.
- Any other information useful for media professionals.

Remember, however, not to overload the kit with too much information. Keep it to the essential items which will help the reporter write a piece without having to call you.

The Media Notification

This will notify the media that the event is to occur. It is sent out before the event, sometimes one week, sometimes six weeks beforehand and sometimes the day before, depending on the media organisation. The notification includes the time, date and precise location of the event. It also includes a brief description of and the reason for the event, with an emphasis on the newsworthy aspect of the event. Contact details for further information are given at the end of the one-page document.

The Media Release

See the previous chapter, 'The Media Release', for details on how to write a release. All releases are set out in a similar way, with the following essential elements:

- organisation or group letterhead;
- date;
- strong headline;

- lead paragraph;
- quotes;
- the end of the release labelled with the word 'ENDS';
- not more than two pages but preferably one;
- your name and contact details, including mobile if you have one, so you are contactable at all times.

The Backgrounder

There could be one or more than one backgrounder in a media kit. The purpose of a backgrounder is, as the name suggests, to provide background information on a topic. All media kits will at least carry a backgrounder giving information about the program at the centre of the event.

The Biographies of Speakers

The kit should include background information, or a biography, of every speaker at the event. Ensure here that names, titles and organisations are up-to-date and spelt correctly.

The Fact Sheet

This is a one-pager which summarises your organisation or group. It outlines your philosophy, mission statement, key messages, goals, services and programs, and any other pertinent facts. It is a good idea to plan ahead with this one, drawing one up to have on hand at all times, ready to slip into a media kit when required.

The Remaining Information

Include any other information that is important for the journalist to know, especially research results and statistics. It is also a good idea to include a running sheet, listing the schedule of activities within the event, so people are aware of what is happening.

Appendix 6 provides examples of the elements of a completed media kit.

Working with the Media

Averting the Interview Nightmare (Be Prepared!)

“While the circumstances under which interviews are conducted vary enormously, what they all have in common is that they involve a journalist talking to at least one other person with a view to obtaining information.”

Barbara Alysen, *The Electronic Reporter*

During an interview a journalist wants to elicit information. During the same interview, you should be trying to get across your view.

It is important to realise that you can take the initiative. If a reporter asks a fairly broad question, you have the opportunity to take it further, twist it around and make sure you include your major messages. Remember a reporter is not a police officer.

If the interviewer doesn't ask you the question you are dying to be asked, be prepared to offer the information anyway. Most politicians are old hands at the media interview and can always manage to get their information across without answering any of the journalist's questions. This is not recommended unless the media is always desperate to interview you.

In all cases, be thoroughly prepared. Following this checklist will help you get the most out of your interview opportunity.

- Find out as much as you can about what is expected of you.
- Think about likely questions and plan answers.
- Prepare briefing notes which include two or three main messages you wish to convey, simple facts and statistics and answers to possible questions.
- Always plan to give information which is clear and simple.
- Practise with colleagues.
- Where appropriate, personalise the issue. Include anecdotes and use a human interest angle rather than just the broad issues and dry information. Demonstrate your authenticity. For example, “I work in a treatment centre and see what these people are going through.” Don't be afraid to let your personality come through. If appropriate, use humour. You will have a greater chance of your interview being used if you use interesting and colourful language, but don't go overboard; it's often not worth making sweeping statements just to get media coverage.
- Avoid jargon, waffle and long words.
- Once you are prepared you should go into the interview feeling relaxed, confident and enthusiastic about your subject – this will help credibility. However, don't be too relaxed. A bit of nervousness keeps you on your toes, as long as it doesn't make you freeze.

Working with the Media

Averting the Interview Nightmare (Be Prepared!) cont...

All Media Interviews Aren't the Same

The requirements for print, radio and television interviews differ. The following tips will help you approach the interview.

The Print Interview

You may be interviewed over the phone or in person. The interview may be short and to the point or longer and in-depth. In either case you should:

- Speak clearly and not too quickly.
 - Reiterate your main points.
 - Explain things simply. Don't assume the journalist knows as much as you do about the topic.
 - Invite them to ring back to check facts.
 - Offer them more information and send it quickly.
 - Get back to them quickly.
 - Try not to make 'off the record' remarks but if you do want to make a comment and don't want to be named make this very clear.
 - Specify the spelling of your name, title and organisation or group, and any specialist terms you use.
-

The Radio Interview

If you are being interviewed by radio for a news report either over the phone or on location the journalist will speak first, then tape your reply. It will normally last only one or two minutes. The average radio interview lasts between 40 and 60 seconds, about five sentences.

A more in-depth program may take a little longer and if you are interviewed in a studio it may take five to ten minutes. The reporter may use a scatter-gun approach, taping as much as possible then deciding later on what the angle or main point will be.

For best results:

- Be prepared to give radio a 'grab' – a catchy, succinct phrase which encapsulates your message.
- If you are being interviewed on location, make sure there is a quiet space available and prevent interruptions.
- Don't be intimidated by the microphone and recording equipment.
- For a chat show, send clear, background information before the interview, stating what the interview will be based on.
- In studio interviews, expect that the interviewer may not look at you or verbally acknowledge your comments.
- Avoid ums and ahs, don't leave long pauses.
- Don't make unnecessary noise like shuffling papers or clanking jewellery.

Working with the Media

Averting the Interview

Nightmare (Be Prepared!) cont...

- Be friendly: you are talking to one person.
- Try to involve listeners by telling them how the issues relate to them. Use words to enable listeners to create a mental picture.
- Try to end the interview with a short statement summing up the main points.
- If it is not live-to-air, be aware that if you really feel uncomfortable with what you have said, you can ask to repeat your answer.

The Television Interview

This is perhaps the most daunting interview of all. As well as the usual preparation for interviews, you should keep in mind these facts about television:

For a news item, the journalist may simply seek information over the phone and may visit to film a short news grab.

For a current affairs story, you may be contacted by a researcher for background information, and you may be filmed in a studio or on location. This will usually be a fairly hard hitting, factual interview (don't worry, not everyone is Jennifer Byrne).

Magazine style television programs such as Good Morning Australia with Bert Newton will have a more relaxed, easy going tone.

Specialised programs such as Quantum will film on location and researchers need to be well briefed.

For best results during the interview:

- Be aware there will be at least three people as well as lights, intrusive cameras and microphones.
- The sound engineer will probably check your voice. Use your normal conversational tone.
- Relax, look at the reporter not at the camera.
- Be succinct, try to encapsulate your message in two or three points.
- If you make a mistake and your interview is being pre-recorded, stop and ask them to start again. If the interview is live, recover quickly and move on to another point.
- If the journalist has chatted to you before the cameras start rolling, don't be afraid to say it all again.
- Make sure your hair, makeup and clothes are neat and professional and don't detract from what you are saying. Avoid wearing black, white or bright clothes and complicated stripes and patterns. You don't want to be upstaged by your hat, unless you are Dame Edna Everage.
- Sit still, try not to move your chair, wave your arms around or fiddle.
- Don't move your eyes around too much.
- Don't become angry or impatient, or thump the table. People will think you are rude and losing the argument. Think about those people in a topical debate on television who get angry or those who lash out at the cameras outside the law courts. It doesn't convey the right message to the audience, who tend to think they are wrong or guilty.
- If you think the interviewer is harassing you it is more effective to say politely, "I don't think that's a fair question."

Working with the Media

Averting the Interview Nightmare (Be Prepared!) cont...

- Don't forget the camera could be on you when you think it isn't.
- Don't expect the reporter to say yes or mumble in agreement all the time. They don't want to have to edit their responses out afterwards.
- Be prepared to do the interview again if equipment fails.

SUMMARY

Decide which message or messages you want to communicate in a media interview, write them down, practise with colleagues. Be as helpful as possible and well informed. Keep in mind the physical constraints of each medium, and adjust accordingly.

Working with the Media

Your Rights

You do not have to answer journalists' questions and, if they print or broadcast something incorrectly, you have certain appeal rights.

You have a right to:

- Refuse to be interviewed.
- Refuse to answer questions.
- Refer the interviewer to another person or expert.
- Ask for time to prepare.
- Ask for questions or angles in advance.
- Ask who else is being interviewed.
- Write to the editor if it is wrong.
- Encourage reporters to use correct terminology. For example, drug users, not drug addicts, people with AIDS, not AIDS victims.

Try not to:

- Leave room for assumption. Make your message clear.
- Ask for the article/interview to be read/played back to you.
- Answer questions and then say it's off the record.
- Say anything you don't want published or broadcast.
- Tell them how to write the article.

It is important to understand that, because of the different agendas of communities and journalists, issues and incidents are rarely going to be reported exactly the way you want them to be. The best you can do is to make your message as clear and simple as possible.

If you are considering making a complaint, you should examine the offending article or broadcast and ask yourself whether minor

errors or mistakes should not simply be treated as acceptable losses. If the outcome is that more people who you want to reach have been reached, then the media coverage has done the job you wanted it to do. Unless it's absolutely crucial, it's really not worth complaining about.

Some of the reasons for errors are:

- Reporters can be pressured by editors to put a certain slant on something.
- Time: writing in a hurry with not enough time to check facts.
- Sub-editors may rewrite, cut or add to a story.
- Plain old reporter's ignorance.
- You may not have presented your message clearly.

If you do have a serious problem with the way something has been reported you should:

First contact the reporter and discuss your concerns with her/him. If you are still not satisfied, you may write a letter to the editor or chief-of-staff. This may or may not be for publication.

If these direct approaches fail then you can raise the matter with the ethics committee of the Media, Entertainment and Arts Alliance (formerly the Australian Journalists' Association), the Australian Press Council or the Australian Broadcasting Authority.

Be aware, however, that each medium has its own code of practice (and even some media organisations have their own code). Check the code of practice that governs the media organisation you are concerned about so you are fully aware of the correct complaint procedure for that organisation. In this way, you can be sure that your complaint will, at least, be heard.

Working with the Media

Your Rights cont...

The Media, Entertainment and Arts Alliance has a code of ethics which says that journalists:

- Must report and interpret the news with scrupulous honesty;
- Should not suppress essential facts and should not distort the truth by omission or wrong or improper emphasis;
- Should always respect the confidences received in the course of their work;
- Should not take unfair or improper advantage of any kind if this may influence their work;
- Should only use fair and honest methods to obtain news, pictures and documents;
- Should always reveal their identity as a member of the media before obtaining any personal interview for the purpose of using it for publication.

The Australia Press Council does not have the power to fine or punish the newspaper or magazine, but it publishes its findings and they are covered by the media throughout Australia. Complaints must be specific, and are not made against an individual journalist.

The Council can be contacted as follows:

The Australian Press Council
Suite 303, 149 Castlereagh St
Sydney NSW 2000

Phone: (02) 9261 1930 or (1800) 02 5712
Fax: (02) 9267 6826

E-Mail for information:
info@presscouncil.org.au

E-Mail for complaints:
complaints@presscouncil.org.au

Information about the Council and the guidelines for lodging a complaint can be found at www.presscouncil.org.au

The Australian Broadcasting Authority investigates complaints about the contents of a radio or television program. It is not required to investigate your complaint unless you have first complained to the broadcaster.

Information about the Australian Broadcasting Authority can be obtained through the website (www.aba.gov.au). Its email address is: info@aba.gov.au and its postal address is:

PO Box Q500,
Queen Victoria Building
NSW 1230

Telephone: (02) 9334 7700

S U M M A R Y

Think twice before complaining about media coverage. Some mistakes are inevitable because of the news gathering process and its limitations. If you do have a serious problem, take it up directly first and, if you are still not satisfied, appeal to the appropriate governing body.

Working with the Media

And Now, Over to You

Working with the media does mean an investment of time – but you will be rewarded if you prepare for media encounters.

The first step is to formulate and implement a public relations strategy for your organisation. How formal or informal this will be is up to you. It can start with a media policy that will ensure everyone is clear about media procedures and it can end in a public relations strategy that helps you to plan all your communications activities for the next two to five years. Or it can be somewhere in between – the main point is that you will be beginning to plan ahead.

If you start with a media policy, involve key people, including management in an organisation, in its development and ensure everyone in the group or organisation receives a copy. It should cover everything from who will take the media calls, to who has to approve the media releases, to who will be your spokespeople. If one person doesn't want the responsibility for dealing with the media it might be worth establishing a small media working group. Whatever you decide make sure you are giving out consistent messages.

If you decide to work with the media, it's important to allocate adequate time and make it a priority. This means responding quickly to calls from journalists and taking advantage of opportunities.

Have vital information at hand. Gather statistics, fact sheets and research on a variety of topics which are likely to interest the media.

Get to know your local media. How many local papers are there? Is there a local radio station? What specialty media is appropriate for you? Be familiar with what sections or programs they run and what issues they are interested in.

Find out your organisation's or group's stand on important issues. If a journalist is writing an article claiming that medically supervised

injecting facilities encourage people to use heroin, then you need to be clear about your position.

Gather lists of media people and contact details and keep them handy. Update them regularly. It's also convenient to keep a personal contact list readily available. It then makes it easier to quickly identify journalists sympathetic to your cause, or who have an interest in a particular issue.

Make personal contact with journalists and other media professionals. Build relationships with them, in which you are helping them as much as they are helping you.

It is important to keep track of all your media encounters, whether it is a quick telephone interview or a major publicity campaign. Complete the evaluation or review section in your publicity plan to form an activity report and attach all relevant material – copies of background notes, invitations, media releases, speeches, published articles.

Remember the media can be powerful so be ready for an influx of phonecalls after receiving media attention.

You may be able to get local support from, or have the funds to engage, an external public relations agency to run a campaign for you or to employ a design company to design a promotional brochure. In either case, having a publicity plan for your campaign or brochure will ensure you have a clear understanding of what you want so you can convey this to the consultant.

Finally, be prepared to make a few mistakes. Like any new skill, working with the media successfully takes practice. Any failures in the early stages will pale into insignificance when an idea you have generated ends up as a positive story on the front page or in the evening news.

