

## **Working with the Media**

Knowing how the media operates and understanding how reporters and editors think is a challenge facing everyone dealing with the media. Every day reporters and editors are deluged with information, news releases and story ideas from a variety of sources. They, in turn, must make subjective decisions about which stories are most interesting, significant or timely. These stories become news.

The basic principles of media relations outlined below will help you or your organization work effectively with news organizations.

- Understand the different types of media. The type of story that appeals to a community newspaper is not necessarily the type of story that lends itself to television. Evaluate your information in terms of its most logical and effective media targets.
- Develop a professional relationship with reporters and editors. It is helpful for organizations to provide useful and reliable information on a regular basis.
- Be aware of breaking news and be available to provide comment and insight. Do not attempt to publicize everything that your organization does; select only the most newsworthy events for publicity.
- Be reliable and honest.

Remember that this is a statewide campaign. That means that you are part of something bigger – that the state plays a role and so do other organizations in your community and throughout the state. You may want to include the state coordinator of the campaign to demonstrate how you are part of a bigger movement focused on “Shifting Your Perspective” and “Applying Trauma-Informed Care.” The state coordinator can also validate the need for trauma-informed care in your community and can bridge the campaign to the national SAMHSA-funded effort to facilitate this change. Other community groups that are participating may also serve well as partners in your outreach.

### **What is Newsworthy**

The following elements, used in combination, offer a story worth pitching to reporters and editors:

- New information or product;
- Timely information – yesterday's news is old news;
- A public figure, a celebrity or a well-known organization;
- A human interest angle or an issue that affects a large number of people;
- A variation of a theme already receiving media attention;
- A threat or danger to the community;
- Something interesting on an otherwise slow news day;
- News that benefits a large number of readers, viewers or listeners; and
- News that pulls at people's "heart strings."

As you consider outreach around the trauma-informed care campaign, consider integrating some of these elements into your plans. For instance, inviting the mayor to come to a kick-off event could be a great opportunity to attract the local paper. Using a success story that demonstrates how trauma-informed care made a difference in the life of one consumer will provide an emotionally compelling demonstration about why this approach is so important.

## **Tips for Writing a Press Release**

While we are providing a template press release for you to use, you may want to create your own. Following are some general guidelines for creating effective press releases.

- List a contact person and contact information (phone number and e-mail) at the top of the page.
- Be brief – one page, single-spaced is preferable.
- Write in the active voice and use short sentences and paragraphs.
- State facts in descending order of importance.
- Include at least two of the five W's (Who, What, Where, When, and Why) in the lead paragraph. Add the other W's to the second paragraph.
- Identify your association's spokesperson no later than the third paragraph.
- Use quotes to make an emotional point or to state an opinion (ideally two to three).
- Include brief background information about your association in the last paragraph.
- If longer than one page, type "-MORE-" at the bottom of the page. Type "###" at the end of your text.

## **How to Handle Media Interviews**

### *Television*

- Wear comfortable, simple clothing in solid colors (definitely no red, busy patterns or stripes). No busy jewelry or large earrings.
- Keep your statements brief and to the point.
- If your interview is pre-recorded for editing later on, start your response by repeating the reporter's question and adding your comments to it. That will give editors more to work with.
- Remember to maintain good posture (sitting at the front of your chair will help) and use natural but not flamboyant gestures.
- Speak in everyday terms.
- Ask for a copy of the interview for your records, but be prepared to record the interview yourself if needed. Watch it and look for ways to improve future performances.

### *Radio*

- Speak clearly.
- Keep your comments brief and in sound bites.
- Always be courteous to the host, other panelists and to any callers.
- Ask for a copy of the interview, but be prepared to record the interview yourself if needed. Listen to it and identify ways to improve your delivery.
- Be prepared for phone interviews.

- Have any relevant statistics, helpful phone numbers to refer the audience to or key points handy so they can be easily referenced.
- Make sure you have a good, clear phone connection.
- Turn off any noisemakers in your office.
- If the interview is taped rather than live remember to talk in short, snappy answers between 10 and 20 seconds long.

*Print*

- Be prepared in advanced. Know your key points. Practice your answers to key questions without memorizing them.
- Expect questions that are all over the map. The question does not matter nearly as much as your answer. Be prepared to construct transitions from broad or irrelevant questions to your key points.
- Try to be an expert on all issues related to mental illness. As appropriate, you should position yourself as an expert from the viewpoint of a consumer, mental health advocate or mental health professional.
- Make sure you have the reporter's name and contact information so that you can share additional information.
- Ask to call the reporter back if you are in doubt about a fact or if you need time to give a little additional thought to a response, but remember that reporters have deadlines.
- Repeat or paraphrase good questions. Do not repeat bad questions.
- Ask for clarification if the meaning of a question is unclear.
- Avoid using jargon and acronyms that people will not understand. If you must use them, explain them. Use "people with mental illness" rather than consumers.
- Do not use phrases such as "I think," "I believe," or "in my opinion." Phrases like this weaken your expertise.
- Be positive and upbeat as appropriate.
- Do not go "off the record."