



## Speak Out: It's About Time to Prevent Sexual Violence

### Working with the Media

MNCASA understands the importance of drawing attention to sexual assault during the month of April, as well as year-round. Using your local media is an excellent way to get publicity for your SAAM events. This section will help guide programs in using various forms of media to get the word out about your important work.

#### Public Service Announcements (PSA)

A PSA is copy generated for use at local television or radio stations regarding important SAAM-related events and important facts. Pitching and placing PSAs is challenging work. However, for programs with limited resources, PSAs can be an effective tool for reaching community members through the media sources that many rely on each day for news and entertainment.

The following are helpful hints for getting your PSA on the air<sup>3</sup>:

- **Do Your Homework:** Listen to the target station. Find out who its audience is. This is sometimes obvious from the programming; if not, the advertising sales department can give you audience demographics. Figure out if there are particularly popular programs or personalities that you would want to try to link up with.
- **Tailor Your PSAs:** Contact the public service director to find out the station's needs and preferences in format, production and deadlines. Find out if there is someone at the station who can help you, especially if you're planning to produce a tape.
- **Prepare Your Pitch:** In addition to the PSAs, there are several documents that you should customize, including pitch memos, pitch kits and mail-in PSA tracking cards.

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<sup>3</sup> Adapted from Covering Kids and Families

- Prepare a Spokesperson: Once you begin pitching your PSAs, some media outlets may request interviews about the issue of sexual violence in your media market.
- Make Preliminary Calls: Make introductory pitch calls before sending your PSAs to media outlets. These initial calls give you a chance to double check your contact information and build a rapport with public service and community affairs professionals.
- Distribute and Follow Up on Your PSA Kits: Consider personally delivering your PSAs and pitch kits to media contacts. If you have not established a relationship yet, mail your materials. After your announcement airs for a while, it is a good idea to let the station know if there was a good response. If you send a thank-you letter, include a copy for the station's "public file".
- Respond to Requests from Your Contacts: As you pitch your PSAs, your media contacts may ask for information that might not be at your fingertips. If you need to follow up on a request, be sure to do so quickly.
- Evaluate the Impact of the PSA Campaign: Track your PSAs once they begin airing. Your media contacts may be able to provide you with specific placement information. You can also track the success of your effort by identifying any increase in the number of calls the hotline receives during the period when the PSAs ran and by trying to discern the number of media impressions the PSA received.
- Share and Build on the Results: Compile your evaluation findings into a memo or presentation to share with your board and organization. Based on the success of your PSA campaign, your program may want to consider taking this media relationship to a new level.

### Press Packets<sup>4</sup>

Press packets are helpful tools for distributing a larger quantity of information to the press. They not only represent your agency, they help to educate the press!

A press packet typically consists of the following items contained in a standard twin pocket folder labeled with your agency information as well as what campaign or event the press packet is associated with. A general agency packet could be titled "Sexual Assault Information Packet."

- One page information sheet describing your agency (mission, services, etc.)
- Contact information for the individual who is assigned to working with media
- Including a business card is a must!!
- Agency brochure(s)
- One page information sheet describing your agency's history
- Fact Sheets

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<sup>4</sup> From The Wisconsin Coalition Against Sexual Assault

Depending on the event you may choose to include different information. Standard fact sheets should include:

- Sexual Assault
- Child Sexual Assault
- Sexual Assault Laws
- Local and National Statistics
- Press Release or Statement (if your packet is being distributed around a particular event.)

Here are some helpful hints regarding Op-Eds, Letters to the Editor and News Releases. You will find a sample of each in this section.

### **What is an Op-Ed?**

An Op-Ed is an opinion piece presented by a guest writer that appears opposite the editorial page in a newspaper. Most papers will print Op-Eds that are around 650-750 words. As Op-Eds grow longer, the risk of them being "chopped" by the editor increases significantly. Because each paper has specific criteria for publishing Op-Eds, it is best to call the editorial page editor of the newspaper to verify its policy, prior to submitting your piece.

*Format:* The first line grabs the reader's attention. The first paragraph highlights the issue, pegs it to the news hook, and states your opinion. Paragraphs should be no more than 2-3 sentences each. Focus on one or two points that flow logically to a brief but strong conclusion. Finish with a strong memorable phrase, also known as a "pull" quote. Be sure that your Op-Ed is double spaced with wide margins and typewritten. Newspapers follow up with people who submit Op-Eds before printing the pieces (to verify the identity of the author). List your name, address, phone, fax and e-mail contact information at the top of the opinion piece.

*How to get your Op-Ed published:* Decide which newspaper you want to submit your Op-Ed to and contact the opinion page staff to ask how they prefer to receive submissions. Instructions for submitting an Op-Ed are usually at the bottom of the page where they appear or on the paper's web site. Some newspapers like to receive them by mail, others prefer faxes, while others favor e-mail.

*Follow up:* Most Op-Ed editors will respond to you within a week. If you have not heard back in that timeframe, or if your piece is particularly time sensitive, you should call the newspaper and inquire about whether they received your Op-Ed and if they are considering publishing it. If they say that they are not interested, be sure to ask why and, if possible, make any suggested changes and re-submit the piece.

*Pass it on:* Send a copy of your Op-Ed to your state representative and senator, your board members and to MNCASA. It is very helpful for the Coalition to keep track of what pieces are being written across the state. It is also important to remember that once an Op-Ed is published, you should take advantage of its publication. Distribute copies of it or email it to others who may find it useful.

Here is an outline for an Op-Ed piece:

<Date>

<Byline>

<Suggested Title>

<First paragraph. Should state your opinion, introduce the issue, and relate it to a recent news event.>

<Remainder of body text. Includes your main points and a brief conclusion.>

<Insert identification information at the end of the article.>

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(Indicates op-ed is finished.)

### **What is a Letter to the Editor?**

Writing a letter to your local paper's editor regarding a news story is a good way to draw attention to your organization and the work you are doing. Sexual assault programs have often written letters to the editor after there has been problematic coverage of a story dealing with sexual assault or sexual predators. Programs also write letters to the editor to recognize the newspaper's exceptional coverage of the issue of sexual assault. Here is an example of a letter to the editor:

<Name of Organization>

<Address>

<Bldg., Floor, Suite, Other Address Info>

<City>, <State> <Zip or Postal Code>

Dear Editor:

<State your reason for writing here. If you are responding to writings or editorials by the media outlet, use the first sentence to reference the title of the article, name of the publication, and date it appeared.>

<State your case here. Include facts and references to establish credibility.>

<End with a strongly worded positive statement. >

Sincerely,

<Writer's Signature if this is a paper copy>

<Name of Writer>

<Writer's Title>

<Writer's Organization>

## What is a News Release?

A news release/advisory, or press release, is a good way to invite members of the media to your SAAM event. The news release should describe the event and give details about time and location. If any prominent local figures are going to be there, such as the Mayor, make sure you include that in your news release. Here is how to format a press release:

- 1) The first line of the e-mail message should read: FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE in all caps. This lets the reporter know the news is authorized for publication on the date they receive it.
- 2) Allow one spacer line then write a headline using a combination of lower case and capital letters. Keep your headline to ten words or less. Do not write the headline in all capital letters because it is harder to read using e-mail software.
- 3) Allow another empty line for spacing, then begin the text of the release as we show with the city and state followed by a dash. All releases must include a date since reporters do not always use releases immediately.
- 4) Include press contact information below the text of the news release. A reporter reading your release should be able to make a decision about your story in the first few sentences. Don't waste that space with contact information. They will scroll down to find out who to contact if they want to follow-up with you.
- 5) Finally, close the document with the characters -30- or ### which are style conventions that let the report know they have reached the end of the story.

Here is a template for a press release:

### **MEDIA RELEASE**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

<date>

CONTACT: <Contact Person, Company Name, Telephone Number, Fax Number, E-mail Address, Web Address>

<Headline>

<City, State, Date> Opening Paragraph (should contain who, what, when, where, why)

Remainder of body text. Should include any relevant information on the topic.

If there is more than one page, use:

-more-

(top of the next page)

<Abbreviated Headline>

Remainder of text.

Restate contact information after your last paragraph.

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(Indicates press release is finished.)

## **Media Timeline**

Timing your outreach to the media for your events is critical. You need to plan your contact strategically. Here are some tips for a media timeline:

### **Ten Days Prior to Activities**

Opinion-Editorial (Op-ed): Ten days prior to your launch, fax or e-mail the op-ed to the editorial page editor at your local newspaper, but do not send an op-ed to more than one newspaper at a time. Follow up with a phone call to reinforce the importance of informing the public that a SAAM event is happening.

### **One Week Prior to Activities if Op-Ed is unsuccessful**

Letter to the Editor: If you are unlikely to get an op-ed printed, or if you have a second newspaper in your community, mail or fax a letter to the editor roughly one week prior to your SAAM event. Encourage community partners to submit letters to the editor in support of your efforts.

### **Three or Four Days Prior to Activities**

News Advisory: With all the hype surrounding sex offenders, the media is interested in reporting new information on sexual violence. When tailoring the advisory, be sure to focus on your awareness activities. Three to four days before your event, fax the advisory to TV, radio and newspaper outlets. Send it to the assignment desk (TV) or news director (radio), unless you have established relationships with specific reporters. Make follow-up calls to each outlet to be sure that reporters know about your effort and encourage them to attend your event.

### **Day of Your Event**

News Release: Again, tailor the release to emphasize your group's SAAM activities. Consider including a quote from a representative of your organization, an elected official, a representative from the local community groups that are involved, or a person who has had a positive experience with your program. Fax or e-mail the release to TV, radio and newspaper outlets on the morning of your event or the day your activities begin and follow up to see if they need more information. If you are requesting that the media attend your press event, be sure you have enough press releases, fact sheets, etc., at your event to give to reporters. Following the event, fax the release or send a press kit to the reporters who did not attend the event.

Instructions on how to create a news/press release are included later in this section.

Audio Bite Line: Offer sound bites from a program spokesperson to radio reporters who cannot attend your SAAM event.

## Talking Points

One of the most important things to remember when talking to the media is to “stay on message.” Newspapers, radio and television stations are all trying to get readers, listeners and viewers. Having an audience is crucial to their existence. As a result, sometimes media outlets will attempt to “sensationalize” something for entertainment value. Staying on message will help you avoid this.

MNCASA has been working with the Minnesota Coalition for Battered Women, the Minnesota Indian Women’s Sexual Assault Coalition and the Minnesota Network for Abuse in Later Life to create talking points for Violence Against Women Action Day. The talking points that we developed were then tailored for MNCASA specific messages. We invite our programs to use these messages when speaking with the media and/or policy makers; however, we understand that programs may choose to use different messages depending on what is happening in their area. A copy of MNCASA’s talking points will be included in your 2006 Legislative Organizing Packet, which will be sent to programs by Pamela McGowan, the Membership Coordinator. For more information, contact Pamela at 651-209-9993 x202 or [Pamela@mncasa.org](mailto:Pamela@mncasa.org).