Engaging local & regional media

Using local and regional media can be a great way to raise awareness about dying, death and bereavement and to build the profile of your organisation. With 1,200 regional and local newspapers in the UK, numerous local and regional radio and TV stations and a growing number of local websites, local and regional media have a substantial reach.

Five Golden Rules

Local and regional media always need good stories and rely heavily on charities, community organisations and local groups to generate them – they need you as much as you need them. But you will need to have a good story to stand out and get journalists’ attention.

By following these five golden rules you should have a great chance of raising awareness about dying, death and bereavement:

1. Know your media
   Too often people fail to get media coverage because they haven’t done their research properly.
   - Are you familiar with your region’s media – the main newspapers and magazines, local radio and TV programmes, local news websites? You need to know the sort of issues they cover, whether they cover sensitive issues responsibly and whether they have columnists, commentators and features as well as news.
   - Have you found about local news agencies? These can be invaluable in getting widespread local coverage.
   - Do you have contact details for key journalists? If not, look online or phone up and find out the name and contact details for who you need – the news editor, features editor, picture editor and so on.

2. Make sure you have key messages
   You need to agree on the key messages you want to communicate through the media, as this will shape what you put in a news release, what you say when you pitch a story and what you say if interviewed.
   - Do you know the key facts and figures on dying, death and bereavement?
   - What are your key messages and how will you relate these to the Dying Matters key messages which include (i) that everyone deserves to die well, (ii) dying well is more likely to be achieved by talking about it early on, and (iii) that it’s vital you talk about your needs and plan your dying with those around you.
   - How would you describe in simple terms what your organisation does, and the action you think needs to be taken if you are publicly saying something has to change?
   - Are any news releases clear, concise and snappy, with a headline that will stand out and a strong opening paragraph?
3. Be creative and make your story stand out

Your story needs to stand out so that journalists cover it and people pay attention. It needs to be new, topical, locally relevant and with human interest.

- Is there a statement or short report you can publish calling for action, for example by local politicians, or do you have a campaign you can ask a local newspaper to back?
- Are you able to localise a national issue, perhaps by talking about local impact of a national development?
- Have any of the people you have been working with got especially interesting stories? (Maybe they have already planned their funeral, or been very successful in fundraising).
- Do you have support from celebrities or high profile local people?
- Have you decided whether your story works best as news, a feature or an opinion piece? News stories are ideal if you are launching something new, holding an event, saying something new or commenting on something important, whereas features can be a great way to get media coverage on dying, death and bereavement through human interest stories. Don’t forget too that you may be able to interest columnists to write about issues around dying, death or bereavement.

4. Plan well and pay attention to detail

Newspaper deadlines are extremely tight so phone up to ask deadlines for copy. Remember too that television and radio news requires a fast turnaround so be ready to meet any requests for filming or interviews. Timing is everything, especially for a news story.

- If you are seeking in-depth features coverage have you allowed enough time to set this up?
- Are your news releases and emails to journalists well written and accurate? Do you have a spokesperson available from the moment you release a story, and are any case studies ready and are you set for filming or photos?
- Remember that unless you have very clearly agreed you are speaking off the record, don’t say anything to journalists that you wouldn’t be happy to see reported or broadcast.
- Have you decided whether you would give the story as an exclusive to a reporter and whether you have an embargo? Make sure you always provide your contact details in news releases, including an out of hours contact number.

5. Invest time in working with the media and don’t give up

It will take time to build up good links with local and regional media but this is time well spent. Don’t bombard journalists but do take the time to build relationships.

- Remember to invite journalists to events you hold
- Do discuss with journalists the sort of stories they would welcome help on and see if you can meet them, as face to face contact really helps.
- Don’t give up if you don’t always get coverage. Remember, you are most likely to get sustained media coverage if the local media know you have expertise and can be relied on to provide fast, accurate information and clear and concise comment so it pays to go the extra mile.

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Useful weblinks:
- www.mediatrust.org
- www.bbc.co.uk/news/england
- www.mediauk.com