

6. USING LOCAL MEDIA

One of the most effective ways of bringing pressure to bear on a campaign target is to get some exposure in the media. Local groups can play a vital role in campaigns by publishing articles, letters and photographs in newspapers and talking about campaigns on local radio.

Media coverage is also a key tool in attracting new members to your group, and generally raising the profile of the group in your area.

Each campaign pack has detailed ideas for raising the campaign with the press, as well as a draft press release for guidance.

PRESS CONTACT PERSON

You may like to nominate one or two people in your group to deal with the media and write any press releases. The role of a press officer is to:

- Organise press coverage of local group events.
- Be responsible for all contacts with local media.
- Collect and collate press cuttings for group records and displays.
- Write press releases.

Important requirements for press officers are:

- A daytime telephone contact number – mobile phone essential.
- Access to a computer and the internet.

A press contact who can only be contacted in the evening may be ineffectual as journalists only work office hours. Reporters who are unsure about attending an event you are organising are more likely to come if you give them a daytime number, so they can get more details from you.

Local papers are far more likely to use a press release that's emailed in the body of the text rather than sent as an attachment.

PRESS CONTACTS LIST

Compile a press list of all your local media outlets, freesheets, local and regional papers, radio and

TV stations. The website of your local paper or radio station should list other media in the area. Alternatively there will be in a media directory in the reference section of your library or contact the WDM media officer for a list. It is well worth adding local specialised newsletters and journals of other local organisations like Friends of the Earth and Amnesty International, parish councils and other local bodies.

Make a note of names, phone and email contacts. Get in touch with them and say that you are the press contact for your WDM group and ask for information on deadlines:

- When do papers etc. go to press?
- When is the deadline for listings, details of local events for the 'what's on' columns and for letters to the editor?
- Evening papers: Deadline for the first edition.
- Local radio: Deadline for news bulletins.

It is important to be able to send things to news editors and picture editors by name. Update the list frequently. Once you have met or spoken to a particular journalist, add their name to a contacts list. Building a working relationship with local reporters is sure to improve your coverage.

PHOTOGRAPHS

It's a good idea to send photos you have taken to picture desks, and you should contact the journalist to ask if they would like to see photos to go with a stunt that you have talked to them about. To use it, they will need the photo to be a high resolution jpeg, but to start with you could send them a link to images that you have put on a photo site like Flickr (www.flickr.com) or send a small thumbnail image so they can see the photo.

KNOWING WHAT WORKS

Look at copies of local papers, listen to radio phone-ins and news programmes so that you can get a sense of the stories they actually use and the way they use them. If you can provide a press release and photo that is ready tailored to fit, you stand much more chance of getting some coverage.

The cost of stopping climate change: [PLACE NAME] campaigners take action

Photo opportunity

What: Local campaigners from [PLACE] will deliver a giant invoice to [NAME] MP demanding payment of the UK's 'climate debt' of more than £600 billion to the world's poorest people

When: [XXX]

Where: [XXX]

Why: Campaigners from the World Development Movement [XXX] group will insist that it is time for the UK to pay the cost of climate change in the developing world and ask MP [NAME] to act.

The anti-poverty campaigners from [PLACE] say that the UK has grown rich on the back of burning fossil fuels, pushing the planet to the brink of climate catastrophe. Climate change is now killing more than 300,000 a year, and is only set to get worse. Because the UK, and other rich countries, caused this crisis they now have a massive 'climate debt' to its victims.

The campaigners from [PLACE] will tell MP [NAME] that the £600 billion would fund renewable energy infrastructure in the developing world and contribute towards allowing developing countries to adapt to the effects of climate change, some of which are already unavoidable. The world's poorest people should not have to pay the price of adapting to the effects of climate change, or the costs of developing in a climate-friendly way. Rich countries must pay the price of the crisis they have caused.

[NAME], who lives in [PLACE], from the World Development Movement [XXX] group said:

"Countries like [PLACE] have caused the climate crisis. It's time they pay the price. I will be holding a protest in my constituency on [DATE] at [VENUE]."

You can use letters to publicise your group and to express an opinion about something which may be in the national press.

It is crucial to emphasise the local importance and impact of issues raised by WDM campaigns. If your press release appears to be solely about faraway people and faraway places it is unlikely to be used, as local publications tend to insist on relevance to local people. Therefore always have this in mind when planning how to present your case to a reporter. In your press release always quote a local person. Where possible highlight an issue's impact on local inhabitants, stress links and find relevant pegs to hang your story around.

WRITING A PRESS RELEASE

This is not as onerous a task as it might at first seem. There is a standard format for press releases that takes account of the fact that a busy journalist will just skim through your release. It is therefore vital that you present the information in a straightforward manner.

- In the first paragraph you should briefly explain who, what, why and where, emphasising the local links.
- Use plain English and short words, sentences and paragraphs.

- Try to keep your release to one side of an A4 page.
- Stick to facts in the text and use quotes to give opinions or add colour to your piece. You can quote yourself as group spokesperson (if you have agreed this with the rest of the group) or somebody else in the group. Try to make the quotes lively, don't be afraid to use more emotive language in your quote.
- Use a short, punchy and preferably attention-grabbing headline for your release.
- Remember to use 'World Development Movement (WDM)' rather than 'WDM'.
- Above your title make sure that you say 'Date', then 'For immediate release' or 'embargoed until...' and 'photo opportunity' if there is one with the date and venue.
- At the bottom of your release put "For Further information contact:" and leave a daytime telephone number.
- Also at the bottom under 'notes for the editor' it is worth giving a brief explanation of WDM.

USING LOCAL RADIO

If you are organising an event which you would like lots of members of the public to attend, target What's On and Helpline shows – they may be able to give you a plug.

Local stations are often very small affairs and rarely have the resources to visit you, so it is likely that any interview will be at the studio or by telephone. They prefer land lines.

People sometimes panic about being interviewed – they get stage nerves or assume that the interviewer will try to catch them out by asking them the most difficult questions. This is rarely the case. The radio journalist is purely after a good story, even if there can also be a drive towards sensationalism.

The important thing is to stick to the facts and the research from WDM to support your arguments. Assume that the interviewer is on your side and aim to tell your story as clearly and informatively as possible.

Ask in advance what will be covered and what the questions will be. Use ordinary language, give lots of examples and avoid jargon. Remember that a lot of people don't know what the WTO is, or know what the World Bank does. Make it personal if you can. Say how you feel affected or concerned to make the issue come to life.

It is also worth listening out for magazine programmes and phone-ins which you might be able to phone in to and talk about a WDM campaign.

KEEPING PRESS RECORDS

Cut out all the articles/photos and record any radio interviews that are organised by your local group and keep them in a file or cuttings book. Send copies to the network development officer. WDM is always keen to see what kind of coverage a campaign gets across Britain. This helps us evaluate our campaigns and develop our ongoing strategy.

BE PERSISTENT AND PROACTIVE

Remember you won't always succeed in getting coverage, and occasionally you may find that what does get printed is completely inaccurate. However, do keep on having a go. Time and time again we have discovered that our campaign targets care about the smallest mention in the press. Remember that you are part of a UK-wide network and that every tiny snippet of coverage is part of a bigger picture that can effect change.

If you're having problems and need advice, or haven't

taken on media work before, call WDM's media officer on 020 7820 4913. He or she may well be busy, but will always get back to local groups as soon as possible.