

Working with Media: Creating a Press List

As you prepare for your National Foster Care Month events and activities, be sure to develop a comprehensive list of local media outlets. This list will enable you to quickly reach out to the appropriate reporters, editors and producers at your local TV and radio stations and newspapers. It is better to plan ahead and create such a list now rather than wait until you frantically need to reach a reporter.

Here are the steps for creating your organization's press list:

- > Determine if there is an existing list of current education, parenting, social issues and children/youth reporters, editors and producers for your local area. Your school system's administrative offices, or local education association, may already have such a list. If the existing list is more than six months old, call all names on the list to make sure they are still covering issues like foster care. Reporters and editors tend to be very mobile and may have relocated to another area or might be covering an entirely different issue. You can't rely on the goodwill of reporters to pass along a story to someone who may be more interested in your issue/topic. Frequently, if you are unable to reach the correct person, your information will be discarded. Avoid faxing materials to "Attention: Education Reporter" – it is much smarter to call and get the appropriate name.
- > If a good list of reporters does not exist, it is not difficult to create your own list. Begin by looking in your local phone book for listings of TV and radio stations, local daily and weekly newspapers and magazines. Call the numbers listed and ask the receptionist for the following information: name of the person(s) most likely to cover foster care, their mailing address, telephone and fax numbers and email address. The receptionist is likely to connect you to the newsroom directly. Simply state who you are and ask for the information you need. If you are put through to the reporter, ask if he or she prefers to receive information via email, fax or regular mail. Record this preference on your list for future reference.
- > Remember to include local cable access TV, university radio stations and newspapers, and public broadcasting stations in your area on your list. If a TV station is not physically located in your community, but *serves* your community, include the station on the list. Also, include any wire services (such as Associated Press, Reuters or UPI) that have a bureau in your community.
- > Make sure to add any reporters who have done stories on foster care in the past, even if they no longer cover this beat. For example, if an anchorperson once did a story about foster care, that person should receive information about National Foster Care Month. She might be in a position to influence a producer to get the story covered.
- > Add "Assignment Editor" to your list of all stations in addition to named reporters, editors and producers. The Assignment Editor is the person who sifts through all potential news stories and assigns reporters to cover them. He or she should receive all press mailings just to make sure nothing slips through the cracks.
- > Send out announcements, advisories and news releases about National Foster Care Month to everyone on your press list. Keep track of which reporters seem receptive to your pitch, even if they do not provide coverage right away. The key to effective media relations is building relationships.