

9. Working with the media on refugee issues

Why work with the media?

Hostile, provocative and derogatory articles about refugees and asylum seekers in media coverage has led to a greater intolerance of asylum seekers and refugees.

As STAR members you can respond to local press coverage and get your voices heard!

By voicing an objection to articles you feel are unfair or inaccurate, or praising positive coverage, you can help change public opinion. You can also use the media to raise awareness of your campaigns, activities or to promote events.

What can I do?

- Monitor the press, particularly your local papers.
- Send articles or letters to your local print media (see below for more info)
- Add your comments online on news sites and blogs. Add positive stories and comments about asylum seekers and refugees.
- Write articles for your student newspaper or university newsletter either on asylum and refugees issues or reports on STAR group activities.
- Get your members emailing or writing too. 10 letters are better than 1! Hold a STAR letter writing party
- Contact the STAR National Office if you'd like copies of some national press cuttings, highlighting current refugee and asylum issues and attitudes.
- Organize a stunt/event and invite the local press to come along and cover it. In order to increase the chances of getting coverage, perhaps you could work with other local community groups or well-known figures.

Getting into your local print media

- Is your action newsworthy? Ask yourself, would YOU want to read about it?
- If you want to capture imaginations, create events that actually generate pictures. For example, sleeping out, releasing a dove, holding a mock ESOL lesson, speaking to a crowd... If you have a friend who's into photography, invite them to come along and cover the event
- Identify how and where you want your story to be covered:
 - **A news story** – A one off event or piece of information.
 - **A feature** – A story with a human face on a personal level. Something that can catch the imagination of a journalist or editor by suggesting something they could get their teeth into
 - **A letter** – Send a letter on an original newsworthy and current topic and can be related to a local issues. Reply to an article they have published. Reply to previous letters or respond to any letters about previous coverage of your campaign
 - **An events listing** – to advertise your up and coming activity
- Take advantage of breaking news – If a story is covered that your activity could relate to, contact the media that broke the story and use it to promote your activity and a follow up story

Writing and sending a press release

- Call first to check deadlines, especially if it is for daily rather than weekly media.
- Learn the names of the reporters who cover the stories most significant to your issue. Skip the Editor and send your story directly to them. If you're cold calling a newspaper, make sure you ask to speak to the most relevant person – The News Editor, Features Editor, Environment Editor, etc
- Include info on:
 - Who you are. Mention the STAR network as well as what your STAR group does
 - What you are doing
 - Why you are doing it
 - When and where it is taking place

- How you can be contacted - your contact details can be marked as **not for publication!** It may be wise to set up a new email account just for responses if you want your contact details printed in the article.
- **Keep it short, sharp and to the point.** Use quotes but avoid using lengthy titles. keep it under 1 side of A4.
- **Check your facts.** Contact the STAR National Office if you have any issues or points you want to clarify. If you're not sure, check! Further inaccuracies can be damaging.
- Check it makes sense. How does it read to the uninformed?
- Identify your best spokesperson – Find an articulate, friendly, well informed and happy to be contacted member of your group to field enquiries from the press
- Keep note of any responses to your story

Student Media

- Arrange to meet the Communications Officer or Student Editor at your SU
- The University will also have publications both for their staff and for the wider local community. Get in touch with your university's marketing or PR department. They might jump at the chance of profiling a group of students doing something so worthwhile in their 'spare' time.
- Hold a poll on campus and send the results – along with a story – to your uni newspaper or radio station

A sample press release can be found in the appendix

5 top tips for media management

1. **Always approach the issue as if you are writing the story – the big W** A news story is not made interesting because of who, when or where it involves but because of **why** such an event is happening.
2. **Never feel obliged to give an immediate reply** - However, if you pledge to call them back by a certain time do not let them down – the life of journalists is built on deadlines and trust in their contacts.
3. **Consider carefully the language you use** - It is not just the message you are sending out that can be significant but also the language it is framed in.
4. **Always consider the 'worst front page scenario'** - If you are involved in a story that is tricky or controversial the best way to approach it is to imagine how it would look on the front page of your local paper.
5. **Newspapers do not lie (but they do embellish)** - People who accuse the press of lying are rarely, if ever, able to justify their claims. What papers often do (especially the tabloid press) is use facts in a value-loaded manner. It may be presented in a way that appalls you, but unless there are clear factual errors then it is not a lie.

The STAR National Office can help you with the media by providing:

- Ideas! We're always happy to talk through your plans and offer other suggestions!
- Help in writing a press release or drafting an article or letter for the press.
- Background information about STAR or current STAR statistics for use in your press releases.
- Links with the Refugee Council Press Office for expert media advice.
- Copies of the STAR National Media Guidelines, as well as the STAR logo are available for registered users to download from the STAR website
- Information on the local and student media in your area.

If you are using the STAR name, then you must keep the national office updated on your media work, especially

- **please send a copy of anything you get published**
- **please inform the office if you are planning anything large scale or involving the National Press. Office staff need to be able to respond appropriately to any media and public interest following STAR group media work.**