

Working with the Media

How to engage successfully with the media to promote positive images of refugees



Monitoring

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.

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 refugee 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

If you are using the STAR name you must inform the national office before you start!

It's easy - just drop Emma an email to emmaw@star-network.org.uk

Promoting your work

You can also try to raise awareness by getting local media to cover your activities.

You could organise 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.

How do I do it?

Take the following steps:

- ★ **Make it interesting.** Think: is your action newsworthy? Would YOU want to read about it?
- ★ **Be photogenic.** If you want to capture imaginations, create events that actually generate pictures. For example, sleeping out, dressing up, performing a symbolic stunt (sit in a cage), 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:
 - *News story* – a one off event or piece of information.

- *Feature* – 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
- *Letter* – send a letter on an original newsworthy and current topic and can be related to a local issue. Reply to an article they have published. Reply to previous letters or respond to any letters about previous coverage of your activities
- *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

Press releases

Here's what you need to do when writing and sending press releases. *A model press release is in the appendix.*

- ★ **Check deadlines.** Call first to check deadlines, especially if it is for daily rather than weekly media.
- ★ **Identify a reporter.** 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** it's happening
 - **Where** it's 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 team if you have any issues or points you want to clarify. If you're not sure, check! Inaccuracies can be damaging to peoples view of refugees and of STAR.
- ★ **Ask someone to read it** who is unfamiliar to see if it makes sense.
- ★ **Identify a spokesperson.** Find an articulate, friendly, well informed member of your group happy to field enquiries from the press.
- ★ **Keep records** of any responses to your story

5 top tips for media management

1. **Remember the big W** - a news story is not made interesting because of who, when, or where but because of why such an event is happening.
2. **Never feel obliged to give an immediate reply** – but if you commit to call them back then don't let them down, the life of journalists is built on deadlines and trust in their contacts.
3. **Mind your language!** It is not just the literal message you are sending that can be significant, the language you use dictates how people will react

4. **Always consider ‘worst front page scenario’** – if you are involved in a potentially controversial story, try imagining how it would look on the front page of the paper before you commit to it.
5. **Newspapers do not lie** (but they embellish!) What papers usually do is use facts in a value-loaded manner. It may be presented in a way that appals you, but it’s difficult to demonstrate that they have made a factual error.

How the national team can help you

- ★ Ideas! We can 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 statistics for use in your press releases.
- ★ Links with expert media advice.
- ★ To get an effective message across it is important that STAR always speaks with one voice, so please contact the national team to find out what other groups are saying before you talk to the media
- ★ Please send us a copy of anything you get published so we can show off about you!

Model Press Release



Note to Picture Editors: photo call, 4:00pm
Mock Casino, wheel of fortune with stewards in black tie.

Venue: St Stephen's Entrance, Houses of Parliament, SW1 OAA

Date of event: Tuesday 25th May 2006, 3:00 – 5:00 pm

Details: Name, Job Title. STAR Office: 020 7820 3006
Home: 020 *** **** Email info@star-network.org.uk Mobile: 04325 *** ****

Students spin the wheel of fortune!

On Tuesday 25th May between 3:00 – 5:00pm, University of London students from “STAR” (Student Action for Refugees) will be running a mock casino with a “Wheel of Fortune” outside the St Stephen's Entrance to the Houses of Parliament. This is taking place as part of the **Lobby of Parliament to oppose the Immigration and Asylum Bill**.

Part of the group's awareness raising activities about the plight of refugees and asylum seekers in the UK, students from STAR aim to let the public know what the reality of this Bill will be for people seeking refuge in this country.

The colourful “Wheel of Fortune”, with STAR members drumming up custom for their “**Asylum Casino**”, represents the lottery that people fleeing persecution will face under the new legislation. The game cards people receive, depending on where the wheel stops, each have examples of the extreme difficulties and poverty people will face when these proposals come into effect. There will be free gingerbread people to give out to passers-by who will be spinning the wheel and taking their chance on fortune, much as asylum seekers will have to do under the new Bill's plans.

The **Coalition for Asylum and Immigration Rights** (CAIR) has been coordinating opposition to the Immigration and Asylum Bill and has called this **lobby of Parliament** seeking to influence the final House of Commons debate. Running along side this is a **public meeting**, in The Grand Committee Room, with speakers including Diane Abbott MP and the President of the National Union of Students, along with representatives from The Refugee Council.

****Named** spokesperson for STAR said:** “This is a major piece of legislation that contains a number of elements of grave concern. In particular the virtually cashless system of support, which will be much more costly and cumbersome to administer than a return to benefits, will cause more havoc and suffering for people who have already been through a great deal.”

***Name*, National Assembly Against Racism,** said: “The voucher system and dispersing asylum seekers all over the country will create a socially excluded group who will become the targets of racists, neo-Nazis and xenophobes. The government's own analysis is that social exclusion leads to racism, violence and crime, yet it proposes to place an extremely vulnerable group of people in just this position. We oppose this bill utterly.”

STAR (Student Action for Refugees) is the national network of student groups working to improve the lives of refugees in the UK.

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www.star-network.org.uk