

7 - Working with the Media

This section covers writing press releases,
researching local and student media
and looking for angles and photo opportunities.

Writing Press Releases

Press releases are the standard way to get your story into the media. It's worth sending them a few weeks ahead of your event and then to follow up with another press release after the event to increase the chances of your story being covered.

Which media should you contact?

It's best to start off with your student media and then try local media.

- **Campus paper, newsletter and radio:** If you know someone who writes for the student paper or has a radio show, it will be helpful as a first contact. However, don't worry if you don't, as your press releases will probably be well received, as there may not be much 'student' news on your campus! **Arrange to go to talk to the Editor** about your campaign and offer to write an article or be interviewed for one. See the end of this section for detailed advice on making the most of student radio for the Student Stop AIDS Campaign.
- **Local papers and radio:** Again, it's likely that your press releases will be well received, so it's worth sending them. Be prepared to be contacted for more details or radio interviews.

Research

Before you send out a press release, do some research first!

Find out the following: -

- 1) Editorial/news e-mail address
- 2) Editorial/news phone & fax number
- 3) Deadline
- 4) Name of the features/politics/education/development 'correspondents'. For local and student media, the news team will probably cover these areas.

Next call them and introduce yourself. Explain what your group does and say you will send them news releases when your group has events. You could also offer to help them with features on HIV/AIDS and other related issues. If it's a student paper, ask if they want to be added to your announcement email list.

Finding the right angle

To get your story covered you will need to present it attractively to the journalist. This is called 'finding the right angle'. For local or student news this angle must have some obvious local significance or relevance, such as "Local MP endorses students' AIDS awareness campaign".

- **Don't send out frequent press releases, which the press is unlikely to use.** You need to build up a good relationship with the press, not annoy them by wasting their time!
- **Stories which involve conflict or which are personalised appeal to the media,** so bear this in mind!

If you are planning an event, keep the needs of the press in mind. If your event is imaginative, visual and relevant, this will help you to get your story covered.

Writing your news release

Use this standard layout:

- **Firstly, on headed paper, put the title 'News Release' at the top.**
- **Date it and give it a snappy title**
- **Mark it 'Photo Opportunity - Crews welcome',** if you want photographers or camera crews to attend.
- **Make it clear when the story is for.** In most cases you'll do this by typing the phrase 'For immediate release' at the top.
- **Use the first paragraph to outline the whole story in brief.** Expand in the second paragraph.
- **Stick in a quote from a group spokesperson.** The print press will often use this in their story, so make it short and effective.
- **Round up with a concluding paragraph.**
- **Mark the release 'ENDS' so they know it's over .**
- **Put contact details for your spokesperson.** A mobile phone number is a good idea.
- **It should all fit on one side of A4.**
- **Add 'Notes for the editor' on a separate sheet.** Put here any references to reports etc.

Ask a friend to check it through and send it off in good time for the news deadline.

FOLLOW UP!

Follow up with a phone call to check that your press release arrived and to ask if they have any questions. Remember to thank them for taking the time to read it! If no one appears at your event, don't worry! Send a press release out after the event. However, if some media does turn up, your spokesperson should be prepared to answer questions and to be interviewed if needed.

The following page gives an example of a press release used to advertise the Speaker Tour 2003.



student stop AIDS campaign

News Release, 16/10/03

For immediate release

Students in (insert city here) Unite to fight HIV and Aids

(Insert name) University hosts international HIV/Aids activists

INSERT DATE: On the (INSERT DATE) in the (INSERT PLACE NAME/ AREA? LECTURE HALL?) from (INSERT TIME), (INSERT NAME) University will be taking part in the nationwide 'Unite against Aids' speaker tour.

The 'Unite against Aids' speakers include African students who work to raise awareness of HIV and Aids, a HIV positive young person from the UK, and HIV/Aids activists from the US and the UK.

The campaign aims to strengthen youth solidarity to tackle an epidemic which kills one young person every 15 seconds. The tour will give (INSERT PLACE NAME) students and public alike the opportunity to hear what it is like for young people from the front line of the epidemic.

The tour has been organised by The Student Stop Aids Campaign, which is supported by People & Planet, Students Partnership Worldwide, Stop AIDS Societies, National Union of Students, United Nations Youth and Student Association (UNYSA), Medical Students International Network (MEDSIN), and ActionZone.

Sentamu Sparks, a 24-year-old Ugandan IT student, works for The Aids Support Organisation (TASO) in Uganda and will be taking part in the tour. He is also part of an international network of young activists, Youth Against AIDS, who ensure that young voices are heard on an international level.

"Young people are the group most affected by HIV and Aids. Almost 60% of infections last year were amongst 16-24 year olds. But we are also the group with the best chance of turning this epidemic around. By raising awareness, lobbying governments and educating each other, I truly believe young people have the power to tackle HIV and Aids," said Sentamu.

MTV will be sponsoring 'Unite to Fight Aids' as part of their successful 'Staying Alive' campaign to raise awareness of HIV and Aids amongst young people. "HIV/AIDS is having a huge impact on people around the world," said Georgia Franklin, MTV's Vice President of Public Affairs. "Through their personal stories, these young HIV/AIDS activists bring hope and courage to the battle against the virus. MTV is proud to support such an important campaign."

The 'Unite to Fight Aids' tour will culminate in a London based action on World Aids Day on the 1st December which will push the UK government to 'ACT on Aids', and provide Access to Care and Treatment for those affected by the virus.

"The global HIV/AIDS crisis is so huge and so devastating that it's easy to feel powerless to do anything about it. But the solutions exist - what's lacking is the political will to make them happen. That's why student organisations in the UK are getting together, as part of an international youth movement campaigning for AIDS sufferers around the world and putting AIDS at the top of the political agenda, where it belongs.", INCLUDE YOUR OWN DETAILS OR QUOTES

Notes to Editors

1. For more information about the Student Stop Aids Coalition Speaker Tour, or to arrange interviews or photographs with the speakers, please contact

Nikki Giles, Press Officer People & Planet:

Tel: 01865 245678

Mob: 07884 187148

Email: nikki@peopleandplanet.org

Or Jenny Ross, SPW Campaigns and Advocacy Manager

Tel: 0207 222 0138

Mob: 07740 377473

Email: spwcampaigns@gn.apc.org

2. The Student Stop Aids Campaign is supported by Students Partnership Worldwide, Stop AIDS Societies, National Union of Students, United Nations Youth and Student Association (UNYSA), Medical Students International Network (MEDSIN), People & Planet and ActionZone.

3. The full venues and dates for the speaker tour are as follows:

Tuesday 21st October

University of East Anglia, Cambridge University

Wednesday 22nd October

All Party Parliamentary Group on AIDS, MTV visit, University of London Union talk, Unite to Fight AIDS Tour Party

Thursday 23rd October

Bristol University, Cardiff University

Friday 24th October

Reading University, Oxford University

Saturday 25th / Sunday 26th

medSIN Conference, Nottingham University

Monday 27th October

Sheffield University, Leeds University

Tuesday 28th

Newcastle University, Durham University

Wednesday 29th

Edinburgh University

Friday 31st

Manchester University, Liverpool University

Saturday 1st / Sunday 2nd

People & Planet Conference,

Speaker Tour Biographies

Benny Vitalis 23 from Tanzania

Benny is studying Geology at the University of Dar Es Salaam (UDSM). He loves music and sport – especially playing basketball. Benny got involved in HIV/AIDS issues whilst he was still at school – realizing that he and his friends were at risk and that they needed to take the responsibility to protect themselves. After finishing school Benny volunteered with SPW to work with young people in rural communities organizing health festivals using music, drama and sport to raise awareness of HIV. As a student at UDSM, Benny is working with former SPW volunteers on campus – organizing festivals, seminars, and a student counseling service.

Sentamu Sparks 24 from Uganda

Sparks works for The Aids Support Organisation (TASO) whilst studying for a degree in information technology and computer science. His work at TASO has involved mobilising young people and advocating on behalf of people living with HIV/AIDS. He is also the country representative for Youth Against AIDS – a network of young activists who seek to ensure that young people's voices are heard in national and international decision-making processes.

Clint Walters 24 from Oxford

Clint found out that he was HIV-positive at the age 17. After volunteering in San Francisco at Health Initiatives for Youth, Clint founded Health Initiatives for Youth-UK in 1999. The organisation's mission is to provide emotional and practical support to HIV positive youth and to empower all young people with accurate, age-appropriate information about HIV and sexually transmitted infections to ensure that they make the best decisions regarding their sexual health and personal well-being. Through HIFY, Clint conducts educational outreach to schools, youth clubs and prisons.

Molly Chanshi 24 from Croydon

Molly was 15 when she learned that her mum was HIV+. Molly's mum, Thandi, is an AIDS activist and her mother's strength and determination has definitely influenced her. Molly is currently working with young people on health issues. She enjoys presenting on radio and going out dancing with her friends.

Sean Barry 21 from the US

Sean studied government and politics at the University of Maryland. In 2001, Sean visited South Africa where he saw first hand the impact of the AIDS crisis and became committed to ensuring that the US Government does more. He became involved in setting up of the Student Global AIDS Campaign – a national grassroots network of students. Sean is now the SGAC policy analyst based in Washington and has coordinated SGAC's lobbying efforts on Capitol Hill.

Letters to the Editor

- **Editors like controversial discussion going on in their letters column.** If you feel they did you an injustice in an article or report, write in and say so!
- **Keep it calm and intelligent.** Stick to your main message and keep the readership of the newspaper in mind - if you are writing to a local paper then global issues must have a local link.
- **Concise, amusing letters** that are under 80 words long and make one or two key points stand a very good chance of publication.
- **Find out what the usual style and length of letters are** by looking at the letters page of the publication.
- **A distinguished signatory will add weight to your letter.** University professors and local celebrities are always good. It is acceptable to pass a letter round a number of potential signatories after it is written.
- **Always include your name and address.** Some papers won't print letters without these. You can ask for your details to be withheld if you like.

What's On guides/Website listings

When you're organising publicity for your event, don't forget the free 'What's On' guide in many papers and on local radio-you can ask for the details of your event to be included. Your student paper may also have a listings section and some Student Unions produce listings including web site listings, so it's worth doing some research so that you get as much (free!) publicity as possible!

Interviews

- Think through what you want to say. Focus on 2 or 3 important points, which you can back up with a few facts.
- If you're worried about the interview, ask to see the questions in advance. If you make a mistake in a recorded interview, you can ask to answer the question again.
- If you're on the radio or TV, get a friend to tape your interview so that you can evaluate what it sounds like.
- These hints also apply to radio 'Phone-Ins'.

Using Student Radio for the Student Stop AIDS Campaign

Student radio stations are a great way to reach large numbers of students. Many universities have a well-equipped student radio station. Student radio is fantastic fun – many BBC radio presenters hark back to their days in student radio, when they could be as creative as they pleased. I hope that this will help you use your student radio station to publicise the Stop AIDS campaign.

Where to begin?

1. Listen to the station's output, have a look at their schedule, and think about how you could fit something in.

For example: Are the programmes mostly music-based? How much time is devoted to news? Is there a current affairs show that could cover the Stop AIDS issue?

It's also worth finding out if the Student Broadcasting Network, an organization that supplies identical programmes to student radio stations through out the UK, provides programming for the station. If SBN provides the programming, you should target a slot that is governed by the station itself.

2. Go to the station and get them interested.

Think up a couple of ideas (see below) and ask a radio station representative to brainstorm with you—they'll know more about the radio station and its capabilities. Radio station staff is generally very approachable – they're usually students working there part-time, or ex-students. It's not too much to ask to speak to the station manager – that role is often filled by a student. You can also speak to the presenter of any show that you think would cover the Stop AIDS Campaign.

3. What are you going to do?

This depends on what equipment the station has available – for example, if you'd like to make a report, you'll need a recorder and a microphone. Most stations have these, but it's worth checking and asking if you can use them. Even if they're low on equipment to take out, there is still a lot that you can do.

Your options fall into two categories – you can insert something into an existing show (easier) or make your own show (harder, but more rewarding and high profile). Bear in mind that the schedule for each term is decided at the start of that term, and sometimes before, so if you want to make your own show (either regularly or a one off) it is important to organize it early. Some schedules fill up right away!

A quick hint on pitching your idea at the station – if the staff are reluctant, remember that most stations enter the *Student Radio Awards* and they get extra marks for including intelligent current affairs output. Why not mention that you'd be helping them out by covering the Student AIDS Campaign?

Finally, it's important to provide clear suggestions for students to take action, such as visiting a website or attending an upcoming event.

Inserts

1. Interviews

The easiest insert is a simple live interview during a regular show. You could discuss your experiences working on HIV/AIDS issues and encourage people to get involved in the Student AIDS Campaign. While a current affairs show is a great forum to discuss the issue, a more general programme, like a breakfast show, will reach an even greater audience.

Each interview should have a purpose and suggestions for students to get involved. For example, an interview in November could encourage students to participate in the run-up to World AIDS Day (December 1st). There are lots of other ways to "peg" your interview to current events – if there's something else happening in the university, such as a speaker event, you could advertise that.

You could also search websites like *oneworld.net* and *gaa.org* for stories about HIV/AIDS. You can then go on the show as an “expert” (well, we think you’re an expert) discussing the HIV/AIDS situation here and overseas.

You can also conduct an interview – for example, do you know anyone at your university who comes from a country where AIDS is pandemic? They could talk about their own experiences. Or perhaps there’s an academic who works in the HIV/AIDS field, who could talk about a particular aspect of the epidemic.

2. Adverts and Promotion Packages

Adverts and promo packages are aired repeatedly, which increases the numbers of students exposed to the message. They are generally 30-60 seconds long with someone speaking on top of background music. For example, one person could say, “World AIDS Day is this week, but why should we care?” Different voices could then quote statistics about the disease. Well all right, it’s a cliché, but adverts tend to involve cliché and it works!

3. Report Packages

Report packages involve a more journalistic approach. One narrator records 2-5 minute inserts based around interviews with other people. I would recommend listening to Radio 4 for hints here- they run packages frequently and they’re not as boring as some people think. All you need for a package is a story, and some interviewees to tell that story for you. The story could be about World AIDS Day, and the interviewees could include someone from a country heavily affected by HIV/AIDS, an ex-SPW volunteer or anyone who has worked with HIV/AIDS, a doctor, a person who is living with HIV/AIDS or is affected by HIV/AIDS, or an academic working with HIV/AIDS. You can gather quotes and assemble them to demonstrate what’s happening in the world right now, why we must get involved, and how we can get involved.

4. Monologues

A monologue is an easy way to put an insert into a show. However, they’re tricky to do well, and as such we don’t hear many of them these days. The best way to do a monologue is to talk about a personal experience. For guidance, I recommend listening to Alastair Cooke’s *Letter from America* on Radio 4, an ongoing monologue that has attracted a cult following in the last decades. Cooke speaks in a very casual way – almost as though conversing.

5. Drama

Drama is a much-ignored area of radio, undoubtedly due to the boring image of *The Archers*. Student radio rarely includes drama, but they can be really great bits of programming that would stand out on a student radio schedule. It’s important to create a story that’s relevant to your audience. A lot of effort must go into making it sound just right – sound effects and so on, as well as recording peoples’ voices in the right place.

6. Comedy

Comedy is an offshoot of drama. While it might prove difficult to produce a comedy about this grave issue, it is possible and highly worthy if you can pull it off. It’s been done before to great effect in

Stop Aids Societies Guide
Blackadder Goes Forth (sending up the first World War, in which millions died) and *La Dolce Vita/A Beautiful Life* (same for the holocaust). Perhaps use those works for inspiration.

7. Affecting the Play list

In the event that your station isn't very keen on speech radio, you can still raise the issue by affecting the play list. All stations carry a set of tunes that they have to play, but beyond those the DJs can choose what they want to play. Why not ask them to play some music from Asia/Africa? Or how about different tunes from the *One Giant Leap* album? *One Giant Leap* was recorded by artists from all over the world and features many positive statements about issues such as HIV/AIDS. The DJ playing these tunes could then comment on them – "this tune was recorded because..."

Making your own show

This will be more difficult, but I encourage you to do it because it's very rewarding. The best idea might be to plan for a really good one-off show focusing on a big event, such as World AIDS Day. There's so much you can do with a show, such as interviews, studio debates, and phone-ins. You can also include any of the above inserts. Don't be afraid to fill half of the show with music, it's almost impossible to keep it going otherwise! If you're going to do a show you'll need to go through your ideas with someone from the station, and get someone to help you with the technical aspects, such as studio production.

If you're feeling really ambitious, and fancy getting into this radio thing, you could get a regular show. To do this you'll probably have to learn to use the studio equipment yourself, but that's not too hard. Also, you might struggle to cover only HIV/AIDS on a weekly show – so perhaps having a show generally about development/international affairs would be better. You can then feature as many AIDS stories as you can find.

How do you make it?

If you're making and pre-recording an insert for a show, then there are some technical issues you'll need some help on. Someone at the station will hopefully be willing to give you a hand. But, here's a quick guide from me, if only to reassure you that production really isn't that hard.

Recording

Whatever you make, you'll certainly have to record some voices at some point. This might be your own voice or someone you're interviewing. Some quick hints:

- ◆ **Interviews:** Conduct the interview somewhere quiet, and without much echo, laboratories and, er, toilets are bad for this. Ask nice, open questions, e.g. "How does HIV/AIDS affect the workforce?" Always point the microphone at the *chin*, not the mouth, to reduce the "pop" you get with Bs and Ps. Golden rule: (I find this really hard) Don't say "mm" and "yes" as the interviewee speaks – just smile and nod! Note – these points also apply if you're doing an interview live on your own show, though hopefully you'll be in a studio and that should make things sound really nice.
- ◆ **Narration:** If you listen to reports, you'll notice that the reporter's voice sounds very *clean* and *close* to you, with no echo. This is important – it gives the narrator authority. This is sometimes achieved by recording in the studio, but most of the time it is achieved by recording in bed! No, I'm serious – if you want to re-create a "dead" studio atmosphere at home you can do it perfectly

well by getting completely under your duvet and speaking into the mic there. Foreign correspondents, without a studio at their disposal, do this *all the time*. All narrated pieces, including dramas and monologues, can be recorded like this.

- ◆ **Drama:** It's best to record any drama in the place where the drama is set. Background noise is useful to set a scene, but if you're recording indoors and intend your scene to be set outdoors, it will sound wrong. The echo on the voices will give it away. I'm not a committed listener, but I happen to know *The Archers* recently set an episode at Glastonbury, and they actually went there to record it!

Editing

You will have to learn how to use the editing software at your student radio station. The computer programmes are pretty logical, and you can get some help from someone at the station. If you're into downloading computer programmes, you can get free trials of some of the best ones. They include: Cool Edit (definitely downloadable), Radioman, SadiE (top of the range) and Soundforge.

Editing is not actually that difficult, as long as you know what you want. Once you've got your piece recorded, sit down and write down exactly how you want them arranged. In the case of a drama this will be easy – scene 1, then scene 2, etc. For a report or promo it might be harder – just sit down and try to “hear” in your head what you want. Also, as already mentioned, listen to reports on the radio to see how they're usually arranged. Most of the time the reporter's voice is followed by a quote from an interviewee, and then the reporter's voice again... alternating like this.

There are generally three simple steps to using an editing programme. 1 – Play your raw material from your recorder into the computer. This gives you a sound file of, for example, a quote. 2 – Get all the quotes you want together, and shift them around into the order you want. 3 – When you're finished, play it out of the computer back onto your recorder. That's your final version!

Important point for inserts!

The newsreader or presenter of a radio or TV show will always read a cue, a short introduction to the insert. I found it surprising that reporters always write the cues for their own pieces (unless they're lazy!). In fact, all inserts, whether they are reports, drama episodes, or whatever, need to come with a number of things when they're handed over:

- A cue of approximately 50 words, introducing the piece. If you're doing a report, *write the cue before you start writing the script for the rest of the report*. Otherwise the cue and the report will probably end up saying the same things.
- A back announcement of approximately 20 words, usually something like: “that was Fred Bloggs reporting for... and if you want more on Stop AIDS, go to this web site...” Additional information (like web sites) is usually put in the “back anno”, though if you don't have confidence in the presenter, put it in the report instead.
- In order to assist the presenter, you should give them “in words” (the starting words of the report) and “out words” (last words, so that the presenter knows when to say the back anno) as well as the duration of the insert.

Derek Thorne

SPW Tanzania Environment 00/01

