

“Getting the message out!” – workshop at NACCOM conference 2011

How can you raise awareness of destitution and generate support and sustainability for your project?

Introduction

- What is our message? Highlighting injustice, turning the tide on culture of disbelief, promoting compassionate response, myth-busting, ending destitution...
- Getting the message out is important- discuss ways in which different projects have raised awareness/generated support, share positive news stories etc.

Example of effective campaigns:

Article in G2 of The Guardian about BOAZ Trust's hosting scheme resulted in people contacting the trust and one UK author set up a monthly donation.

Lucy (Destitution Asylum Seekers Huddersfield) wrote a short monologue *For Jimmy* about the death of Jimmy Mubenga - being broadcast on elfm.co.uk on Sunday 5th Feb between 5.30 and 7 and then will be archived.

Article in the Yorkshire Post organised by Assist to draw attention to the contract awarded to G4S.

Detention Action in Dover made a cartoon film called 'Detained Voices' and show it as part of a roadshow; this is particularly effective at universities.

Scottish Refugee Council have videos on the subject of voices of destitution in Glasgow.

Ice and Fire's asylum monologues and dialogues.

Assist are running a training session for asylum seeker speakers who are interested in going into schools to spread the word.

On media websites where there are negative comments about asylum seekers- engage and respond! Advocate on people's behalf!

- Getting the message out is difficult- share ways in which it is hard! *Negative comments under online articles, clients having to remember stories they would rather forget...*

Ways to 'Get the message out' ...

1) Communicate with supporters

- Communicate regularly but in bite-sized chunks
- Be friendly and tell stories- that's what people want to hear
- Find a balance between good news stories and hard situations- but always have a human element.

- 'Mailchimp' is a good online tool for sending out regular correspondence (and free!).

Question: what should we do if there isn't really any news but we want to keep in touch on a regular basis?

Have a home page and separate blog bit.

Ask weekly for good news and make a note of it somewhere so it doesn't get forgotten. **John O** is a good source of regular information and the **NCADC**, so that can be put in.

There seem to be two blogs, one by a barrister and one by John O himself (more informal). Both are very good. Keep a good mixture of the local, personal and national, and keep things looking up to date.

2) Get creative- multi-media tools

- Look at what websites and methods of communication you like and get feedback from team.
- Try to have different modes of communication available, e.g. video, website, social networks, paper newsletters etc.
- If you have a website make it manageable, so you can keep info up to date.
- Identify your skills and what you're not good at (SWOT) and seek out people who can fill the gaps.
- 'Fluent in Asylum' campaign- great communications from the Refugee Action Project.

3) Volunteers

- Get volunteers onside – word of mouth is so effective! People who are supportive and will root for you- find them out and give them a role.
- Boaz 'Ambassadors' scheme- launched in Nov 2011 where people from local churches, hosts, trustees, donors, volunteers, etc. go out and represent BOAZ in their churches. Try to include universities, and maybe access them via the STAR sleepout (contact STAR and Amnesty). *E.g. Christmas cards 2011-- sold twice as many this year because of people selling them for us in churches around Manchester- we simply couldn't do that by ourselves.*
- Rather than going direct to the top of organizations/churches, find people who will advocate for your organization and use them instead.
- Make sure they are accountable to you- keep check on what people are up to!

Question: how do you get people on-side? (E.g. a lot of people we want to contact aren't very 'activist' e.g. churches. How do we get them to empathise?)

With groups:

Play to people's strengths.

Emphasise the things they are likely to be interested in.

Find people to bridge the gap (e.g. Christians in churches, students in uni...)

Smooth communication is key.

Consider setting up Ambassador scheme?

With more hostile organizations:

Think about their priorities and concerns, particularly if they might be in competition (e.g. UKBA, as talked about by Mike Kaye in his address).

Engage their point of view and learn sound-bite facts and stats. Get comparison figures for immigration, asylum seekers, emigration. Asylum seekers and new refugees are often ready and willing to get a job. Perhaps it is the fault of companies if they aren't able to work because they are not being offered work.

Try to suppress your emotions as this can get in the way with a discussion on such a potentially controversial topic. It is important for people to voice their concerns and acknowledge differences; try not to be defensive and be constructive, particularly because polls tend to be very negative.

4) Find positive contacts in media

- Who do you have on your side?
- Share knowledge and good practice with other organizations- use NACCOM for this.
- Be wise about which battles you fight- focus on what your organization can do and not what it can't (don't look at need otherwise you'll be overwhelmed...)
- The local media are more open than national media generally.

5) Raise money

- Sponsorships/challenges are an opportunity to share stories on a wider scale- have good news stories for the media (think of the positivity around the Sweep up groups after riots...) *Lent Endurance Challenge, GMR*
- Alternative gifts catalogue- by having something like this you are highlighting to people exactly where their money could go and how useful/practical it is. Makes people think differently about donating. *We have raised £600 so far from the AGC*

6) Communicate with donors

- With individual donors don't always ask for money! Mini report half way through financial year letting them know what's going on...
- Use opportunities from trusts asking for monitoring and evaluating to think about what's going on- avoid the culture of reacting and become more reflective! *This is hard but it does make a difference because you can then use these stats and stories for other communications as well...*

Myth busting- Replies to difficult arguments...

- **They are taking our jobs-** Asylum seekers can't legally work! Talk about results of this- e.g. stress that the UKBA making people destitute is making the situation worse for people trying to get a

job because it forces asylum seekers into working illegally and this pushes down the price for the job, making it harder for people who can work legally to get work, and at a decent wage.. They work illegally because there is no support and they are not allowed to work.

- **Difficulties with specific prejudices... Islamophobia, homophobia, racism.** Counter with appeal to humanity- equality- human rights- recognising benefits of other cultures... Try to educate about human rights abuses and how corrupt/prejudiced some countries' governments are!
- **They are illegal/bogus/chancers-** this is a common image promoted in the press: but counter with economic/social reality that is they can't scrounge if they aren't being given anything! Explain that there is no such thing as an illegal asylum seeker- explain Refugee Convention etc.
- **There is confusion between economic migrants and asylum seekers.** Get some figures. Huge misinformation and lack of information. Most people don't understand the difference between and asylum seeker and a refugee.
- **They take our council houses/they get priority...** Firstly, where else can they go? Explain that people who come here often literally have nothing- appeal to people's humanity/common sense. Acknowledge problems with council housing (recognize there isn't enough of it and people are on waiting lists) and explain that when refused clients are evicted and left with nowhere. Explain that Sec 95/4 housing is often bottom of the pile, bad locations, bad quality housing, without basic amenities at times...
- **'They get free mobiles'**- not everyone has a mobile! And they're not free! But those that do... many people don't understand that this is the only way to communicate with friends/family/agencies/solicitors etc.
- **They're poor and uneducated.** Many are professional people and that's why they had to flee. Fight misconceptions with case studies e.g. doctors, journalists, teachers, politicians...
- **They need to learn English.** Talk about how most do want to learn- e.g. ESOL classes- counter myths with case studies! But also, talk how people can't access education/training without National Insurance no's/benefits, thus leaving destitute asylum seekers stuck in their situation... Also talk about how when people are scared/unable to trust anyone they will naturally stick with people they know/languages they understand/cultural norms they trust. Appeal to humanity- ask *what would you do?!*
- **'Britain is full- we're being flooded- they're everywhere'!** Get stats from UNHCR and SHSH as well as Home Office stats- the reality is that, as Mike Kaye said in morning talk, if you put last year's figures together with this year, wouldn't even half-full Old Trafford! Come out with stats like that to counter myths from media scare-mongering...

- **Why do they come here and not elsewhere?** Statistics show many more are being taken in Europe and across the world- ie. Britain not getting its 'fair share'. Also, it's not a new argument- show cyclical nature of media (find old newspaper headlines from 1940s etc to prove the point!)
Scottish Refugee Council research shows many people had no idea they were being brought here, until they actually arrived: there was no choice... for others they know English due to colonial times, e.g. Zimbabwe, therefore more likely to have connections here...
Another example, Boaz volunteer from Australia told story of when she put up a map to ask people where they thought asylum seekers went to the most, and they all put post-it notes to indicate Australia. Good opportunity to then educate people and address lies!
Think of the tremendous benefit and potential of having different cultures in Britain- focus on positives! Think of Refugee Week campaign 2011 with postcards of 'British' concepts which were actually invented by/started by refugees (e.g. Marks and Spencers, the Mini, fish and chips...)
- **'Send them back'** – give case studies of situations in which people have been stranded, left in limbo etc. Firstly *often they can't go back* (e.g. statelessness/not right travel docs). Secondly, *what is best case scenario for if they do have to go back?* E.g. from Boaz – when we were assessed for money from Comic Relief's women's project, the assessor wanted a riposte to the Daily Mail type challenges about asylum seekers: it was pointed out that the argument to send people back could be supported by saying that if we do have to send people back they should be sent back in a better position to survive in their country, i.e. stronger and more resilient...