

Using the mass media to reach out

Summary of a short presentation in Acapulco , November 2006

The classical way

The classic way to raise the awareness , to increase the visibility of intellectual disability, is through conventions , meetings, small meetings and bigger ones. Telling our stories , convincing people in a very personal and direct way. Besides , we may issue newsletters, brochures, leaflets . We may even make our own Website to convey our messages, particularly to a younger generation.

All activities in developing countries tend to start urban and then to go rural. Usually our past and current activity has been concentrated in the urban area where a part of our target group can be reached. A slow process but it works to some extent.

Question remains whether we will reach sufficient people in the urban area ; even more important is whether we will reach the many people that live in the rural area . Be aware that in most developing countries some 70 % of the disabled persons live in the rural area. Less literacy, less communication and less transport usually form the barriers..

To reach out , a major challenge

The problem that many of us are facing is how to reach the many people that do not live in town, that do not come to our meetings, that are not very much aware of our stories of human rights, the services they could get etc. Our challenge is to reach out to the rural area in particular.

First of all we will have to raise the awareness and increase the visibility of intellectual disability, the role of parents and families . This can only be achieved through the public media. There is no other way.

This of course must be followed up by and must go hand in hand with a “grass roots” activity. That means the communication to all those that are involved, the real field work.at local level. In this paper we will only focus on the role of the public mass media.

The mass media

We all will agree that they are a key factor. Our whole society seems to depend on what the media tell the people. But why then does not it always work that way in our activities for and with the disabled person?

Many of our NGO's are reluctant to meet a journalist . Why ?

Three reasons why we fail

- 1 We feel that the media usually are not very much interested in our cause. But more importantly : we often do not know our own story, the facts, the arguments, the answers on critical questions. We do not feel very confident. We might lose our face in a confrontation with a journalist . In a press interview, a radio interview, a TV program.....
- 2 We do not really know how the media work. The media may have their own objectives, their interests , their procedures. We are not very familiar with their world.
- 3 We do not know very well how to perform in a press conference, in front of a microphone , a TV camera, in an interactive program .

We have prepared a Media Seminar for people who in view of their position in a Parents' Association or an NGO, may have opportunities to tell good stories through the media to the public.

In line with the above mentioned “ *three reasons why we fail* “ our approach for a Media Seminar is in three steps :

Step one : know your story

What do we really want to tell to the public ? Telling a correct story, using the right facts, the right statistics, the right arguments. Giving the right answers to critical questions .

Compose a manual that you call “ *Facts & Arguments* “. Preparing this manual will take much time and effort.

Participants of a media seminar must know their *Facts & Arguments* “ before even coming to the seminar.

Facts & Arguments include chapters on :

- Human Rights , legislation, provisions, role of government, role of NGO's
- School/home education, vocational education, employment
- Inclusion International, the local partner, PMAG program
- Role of parents, parents' associations, self advocacy
- Increasing public awareness and visibility through the use of public media
- Financial and human resources , fund raising
- Local data added by each participant

Step two : the media

We usually do not really know how the media work. Participants must get familiarized with the media. Their objectives, their interests, the issues that they think important, their procedures. Participants will discover what the media think of interest in our stories . Their world and our world will have to meet.

Participants will learn the need to develop an ongoing relationship with the media people, it forms the platform at moments when we need them.

Step three : Performing

Participants will now do some practical work. Practical cases, performances for the microphone, the TV camera, in a press conference, an interactive group session etc . This phase is very important. It is a challenge , but we must realize that it is only the third step.

N.B. attention !

We must be aware that Step one “ *Facts & Arguments*” is the basis for the whole seminar. It is the step that most participants will not really like. The digestion of “ *Facts & Arguments* “ will require time and effort. Participants tend to prefer Step Three i.e. the actual performance rather than spending their time to digest the “ *Facts & Arguments*” .

Media are in need of ready made material

There are opportunities to provide a TV station with a ready made video, a short film or a 30 seconds shot A newspaper may need good photographic material, a ready made text or well prepared readily available background information. All that has got to be prepared.

A final advice : ensure that the monitors in a seminar are professional media people who have practical experience with Newspapers,, the Radio and the TV.
Avoid theoretical lectures by university persons specialized in communication and the like.
Let it primarily be an interaction between practice oriented media experts and the participants.
Find a venue with sufficient radio and TV equipment and facilities.

Our first seminar was in June 2006 in India . It was a pilot. It has been a successful learning experience. We are now preparing other seminars based on the same model. In India , the Philippines.

We may assist other NGO's in other developing countries

Acapulco, November 2006

Jan G. Vorstman

Inclusion International