

## How to achieve local press coverage

Press coverage of your Unit's activities can enhance your standing in the community; raise your profile locally and more important, facilitate key objectives: recruiting / fundraising and support. Your message will reach more people through a story in your local paper or sound-bite on your local radio station, than almost any other form of communication.

The following guidelines are, therefore, designed to help you achieve beneficial coverage in your local press.

### NEWS RELEASE

Newspapers receive information from many sources. The most effective method of sending information to the local press is the News Release, either e-mail or hard copy, which will be judged on news value. Remember, individuals and organisations are competing for editorial column inches, so a large percentage of submitted news items will be "spiked" because they are not judged to be newsworthy. **YOU NEED TO CREATE AN INTERESTING "NEWS ANGLE" TO CLEAR THE FIRST HURDLE.** What may be of interest to the Unit may not necessarily have the "angle" to make it a news story.

### THE FORMAT

Make life easy for the journalist. Your news release must be headed with the name, logo etc, of your Unit, dated and catchlined (titled)\* and must include contact details (name / phone number) for follow up enquiries. The most widely accepted font is Arial and double spacing allows for ease of editing.

*\*The headline is key and should be emboldened to stand out. You have just three seconds to catch an editor's attention so the headline must convey: This looks interesting to my readers..seems newsworthy..I shall read on*

### THE METHOD

Before embarking on a press campaign (recruiting/fundraising) invite the local editor to a Unit function to illustrate the opportunities you are providing for local youth. Never assume prior knowledge of Sea Cadet activity which you might take for granted – **ALWAYS PROVIDE BASIC INFORMATION ie BROCHURE / FACTFILE / BRIEFING NOTE (\*a\*)**

- Read the local paper to assess the reporting style – what kind of story makes the front page.
- Produce your **NEWS RELEASE** in a short, factual, interesting style which can be expanded with follow up quotes and comment. Keep it short and to the point.
- Send photographs (high resolution images or prints) to illustrate the subject. Digital images **must** be a minimum of 300 dpi at 6"x4". Make sure they are clearly captioned. (A brief caption on a label stuck on the back of a print is perfectly acceptable – but whatever format you use, make sure your contact details are included with the picture in case it becomes detached from the news release)

• **IDENTIFY CADETS ONLY BY NAME RANK AND UNIT. OBTAIN PARENTAL CONSENT. NEVER GIVE PERSONAL DETAILS.**

• Who to contact: For local newspapers and local interest magazines the most appropriate contact to address your news release to will be the **News Editor**. Smaller publications will have just an editor, but News Editor is always a safe title and will ensure that your news release reaches the News Desk. Some bigger, regional or national newspapers will have a community affairs editor / reporter, or youth correspondent – it is always worth a telephone call to check because this is the journalist who will be particularly interested in community or youth group news. For radio and TV, the best route is to ask for the **Forward Planning Desk**. Journalists on this desk receive news stories, assess their ‘news values’ and appropriateness and put them forward to the programme producer at regular planning meetings.

*Don't be disappointed if you do not achieve immediate results, it takes time to develop a relationship with your local paper which will become mutually beneficial.*

*News is an illusive concept so if you are concerned that you do not have a sound news angle and would like advice, contact the Communications team at MSSCHQ*

**RESPONDING TO MEDIA ENQUIRIES**

News outlets, either electronic (radio/TV) or print press, will often seek a local angle to a national story, or request comment on criticism however ill founded. When responding to media enquiries remember:

• Don't feel obliged to respond immediately. Buy time to collect your thoughts and check your facts. Tell the reporter you will call them back, but make sure you do. Ask what the deadline for your response is and remember if you miss the deadline your story is not necessarily news the next day and you will have missed the opportunity to comment.

• Never say “no comment” – this implies you have something to hide

• Stick to the facts – do not offer opinion or conjecture (which could be distorted)

• Comment only on matters totally within your knowledge and jurisdiction. In all other circumstances refer the caller to Area or MSSCHQ.

Example: Question: *What is your attitude to bullying?* Answer:

- *Bullying is not tolerated in the Sea Cadet Corps.*
- *We have a strict code of conduct for adult staff and cadets which includes zero tolerance to any form of bullying.*
- *All our volunteer instructors must be qualified, experienced in their subject, conversant with Child Protection policy and practice and have full Criminal Record Bureau clearance before they are permitted to work with our young people.*
- *The Sea Cadet Corps is a youth organisation dedicated to providing young people with life skills and opportunities. Although based on the*

*traditions of the Royal Navy, the Sea Cadet Corps is neither pre-service nor a recruiting mechanism for the Armed Forces*

**(\*a\*) BRIEFING NOTE**

**Ten things you might not know about The Sea Cadets**

**1** Delivers key youth policy i.e. diversion from crime, community development, social inclusion and Agenda 21.

**2** Provides additional learning opportunities and qualifications for 10 – 18 year old girls and boys.

**3** Sponsored by the Royal Navy, but not pre-service or recruiting focussed, our Aim is to foster good citizenship by preparing young people to play an active role in their own community.

**4** Our parent charity The Marine Society & Sea Cadets is the largest, oldest maritime charity in the world, and each of the 400 Sea Cadet Units which make up the Sea Cadet Corps is an independent charity in its own right.

**5** Junior image of the Senior Service, the Sea Cadet Corps flies the flag for the Royal Navy (and Merchant Marine) where it matters most, in the youthful heart of the community.

**6** Preserving nautical traditions, hornpipe and cutlass drills, knots and splices, seamanship under sail aboard our square rigged flagship, semaphore and the flags of Nelson's Navy, adventure and excitement – the perfect antidote to computer game syndrome!

**7** Sea Cadet Units serve their local community from which volunteer staff and Cadets are drawn.

**8** All our instructors are qualified, CRB cleared and approved to work with young people. All our staff are required to conform to a written, formal Code of Conduct.

**9** Uniform and equipment is provided free of charge and weekly activities cost Cadets less than the price of a packet of chewing gum.

**10** Many Units have Marine Cadet Detachments, open to boys and girls over age thirteen, based on the traditions of the Royal Marines. Forty percent of Sea Cadets are girls.