

CREATING A MEDIA EVENT

Reporters are always looking for “feel-good” stories that involve community members as well as new angles on topics they have reported on in the past. So, while you’re planning your activities, don’t overlook press outreach. Following are **Ten Easy Steps** from *National Foster Care Month* to getting media coverage of your event, followed by sample press materials that you can quickly tailor to your needs. Examples are given below for the “May is Foster Care” event. You can find more specifics on this event and the toolkit they developed at www.fostercaremonth.org. This is a wonderful time to join others in celebrating those who contribute to foster care.

Remember however, that contact with the media needs to be done year-round. The examples below would also apply to many other events you can plan throughout the year. Before you begin creating new events to capture media attention, think about what your agency is planning this year already! If you hold an agency picnic or sporting event, these too will fit the steps listed below. Do you have workshops or training being offered? Do you have Foster Parents who have served children for 5 years, for 10 years? Are you doing any service in partnership with a public agency? Will you announce a new service being offered at your agency? Any of the above...and no doubt numerous other things occurring naturally at your agency... can be spotlighted as an “event.” It may all be in the way you frame the situation! Happy and out-of-the-ordinary things happen every day around the country...start thinking of those things as newsworthy items...or even events! If you are having trouble looking at the coming year in terms of “news,” review the past year and discuss with your staff what occurred. As you think in retrospect what you *could* have highlighted as news, perhaps that will get you started looking at the upcoming year. Remember to focus on confidentiality as you include the media!

Step One: Save the Date

Send out a Save the Date (see sample below) note to all of your local media outlets. This should be done at least one month prior to an event you are planning. Don’t depend on this being your only contact with media for the event however. You will need to follow up as the event date approaches to see that they have actually *assigned* someone to cover the event. News media receive many, many such notices and you will need to check back with them if you want to be sure you will have the event covered.

If you don’t already have an existing list of reporters, editors, and producers who cover family issues in your area, this is a good time to create one. Make a list of all the TV and radio stations (including college- and university-affiliated stations), local newspapers (including weeklies), and magazines. Then call and ask for the name of the editor, reporter, or producer who covers foster care or family issues. Also get telephone, fax and, if possible, e-mail addresses. [A good link to local and national media outlets is http://dir.yahoo.com/news_and_media/](http://dir.yahoo.com/news_and_media/)

Sample Save the Date from the “May is Foster Care Month Toolkit”

NATIONAL FOSTER CARE MONTH

During the month of May, communities across the country will be celebrating the important role we can all play in the lives of children in foster care. Here in (name of community) we are planning several special events to honor foster families and encourage others to get involved in the lives of children in foster care.

We hope you'll work with us to develop stories about foster care during the month of May. We'd be happy to provide you with resources, spokespersons, fact sheets and any other information you might need. Call (contact name and #) if you have questions.

Member of the Foster Family-Based Treatment Association

Step Two: Plan Your Event

What kind of event can you hold to attract the attention of the press and of other targeted audiences? Here are some ideas:

- A breakfast to honor foster families in your community. The breakfast could include a few speeches by elected officials, child welfare advocates, and alumni and foster parents. It would be celebratory and fun.
- A press conference at the Governor's Mansion to unveil the proclamation about National Foster Care Month or in any month to honor a foster parent who has served for an extended time with your agency.
- Invite reporters to meet with some foster parents and former foster youth who have made the transition to adulthood.
- Invite reporters to attend a short version of foster care training so they can see what's involved in becoming a licensed provider.

Step Three: Invite Them to Come

Once you have designed your event, you may want to use the media to encourage people to come. An "event" can include a very small group also, so don't get hung up on feeling that every newsworthy event must include a large group...or must invite the public. If you wish to invite the public, below is a sample announcement which you can tailor for your use:

Sample Announcement from the "May is Foster Care Month Toolkit"

Help us honor the people in (name of community) who make the world a brighter place for children in foster care. On (date and time) (name of program) invites everyone in the community to a Foster Care Month (name of event) at (location). We'll (give a 20 word description of event). Don't miss out on this great opportunity to find out how you can make a difference in the lives of children in care living in your neighborhood. For more information, call (phone number).

This announcement can be sent to all local community calendar editors of media outlets four weeks prior to your event. You can attach a short note asking the editor to run the announcement as often as possible. Be sure to include your phone number in case there are any questions.

Step Four: Tell Them Why It's Important

Develop key messages about your program. These messages will be integrated into all your press materials and will be the primary things said by all your spokespersons. If possible you should narrow your key messages to three. In your messages, you want to convey why foster families and others who are involved in the lives of foster children and youth are important to the well-being of children and to the

community, why you are participating in the “event” and what you want the community to do in response to the event (such as come forward to be a foster parent...or even just celebrate the efforts of children who have accomplished goals). If possible, use numbers that reflect how many children are in foster care in your community, how many available foster homes there are, and where people can get more information about getting involved. Here are the 5 key points from the “May is Foster Care Month” initiative:

Five Ways to Foster Our Future (from the “May is Foster Care Month Toolkit”):

1. Be a foster parent.

Make a real and lasting difference by sharing your home, time, energy, and love with a child, a youth, or a sibling group in need of a permanent home.

2. Honor a foster parent.

Attend or organize a Foster Care Month event such as a dinner, coffee gathering, picnic, auction, etc. to raise awareness and express appreciation for foster parents, social workers and others who make a difference in the lives of children. If you are not able to participate in person, consider making a donation to a local foster care agency.

3. Be a volunteer child advocate.

Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) volunteers are trained citizens appointed by judges to represent the best interests of abused and neglected children in court.

4. Mentor a youth.

Mentors make a difference. Research shows that children and youth with mentors earn higher grades and report improved relationships with their friends and families.

5. Hire a young person.

Help a youth in foster care explore career options and find a job.

Step Five: Appeal to the Press

Plan your event with the press in mind. Some things to remember:

- The media – particularly television reporters – are looking for good visuals. Make sure your event has lots of color and action and signs or banners with your program name prominently placed.
- Choose two or three spokespersons. They might include a well-known community child welfare advocate, a foster parent, a young adult who has made the transition from foster care to adulthood, or an elected official. Make sure the spokespersons have the messages you’ve created and are familiar with all aspects of the event, with relating to the media, and with your confidentiality policies.
- Sign up reporters and identify them with badges or nametags as they enter your event so everyone knows who they are.

Step Six: Send a Press Advisory

One week prior to your event, write a press advisory (see sample) that will serve as an invitation to reporters. An advisory is very basic – who, what, where and when. If you have a news service bureau in your community (Associated Press, United Press International, Reuter’s), be sure to fax a copy of the advisory to the “Daybook Editor.” This is a person who publishes a calendar of newsworthy events for

other reporters to check each day. Mail or fax it to everyone else on your press list. The day before your event, call all reporters/editors/producers who were sent the advisory to make sure they received it and find out if they (or someone from their media outlet) can make it to the event. Some newspapers may send photographers, so you will want to ask if that is planned. If possible get the name of the person (s) who will be sent, so that you can inform the spokespersons in advance...that way they can begin to be familiar with the names. If they are unable to make it, ask if you can send a news release on the day of the event. Many news outlets may be willing to print a press release word for word, but are unable to send a reporter to an event.

Step Seven: Prepare a News Release

About a week before your event – or as soon as all the details are nailed down – you should write a news release (see sample.) The news release is written like a news story, but has the advantage of being written from your point of view. It contains quotes from important people, background on foster care in your community, and always contains your top messages. You may want to use some quotes from “children’s essays” available in this briefcase. It should be no longer than two pages double-spaced. It is essential to list a contact person and daytime and evening numbers. Because the news release will be distributed at your event in the press kits, it should be written in the past tense.

Step Eight: Develop a Press Kit

As soon as your news release is written, it’s time to put together a press kit for distribution at your event. You won’t need to create a lot of press kits – only as many as the number of reporters you think will show up. The kit should contain:

- The news release. Keep in mind that sometimes the media will take parts of their story from this release and it may be word-for-word! So be sure you have it reviewed by others in your agency for grammar and specific wording. Make it clear enough for someone to understand...someone without any foster care background. Pretend you are writing a news article yourself for the newspaper, radio or television...because in some cases that’s exactly as it turns out!
- A one-page background sheet on foster care in your community
- A one-page fact sheet on Treatment Foster Care nationally and the Foster Family-Based Treatment Association (included in this briefcase) It may also contain:
- A list of agencies in your community that train foster parents, if appropriate
- A proclamation from your mayor if appropriate
- State or county requirements for licensing foster families
- Profiles of some exceptional foster families in your community, if appropriate
- You do not want the press kit to contain more than ten pages of paper. Materials should appear on your agency letterhead with “Member agency of the Foster Family-Based Treatment Association” somewhere on each item. Make sure there is contact information in case the reporter wants to call someone in the weeks after the event.

Step Nine: Event Management

On the day of your event, set up a “press sign-in” table. It should be easily recognizable to reporters and should be at the entrance to the room or location where your event will take place. A staff person or volunteer should be at the table throughout the event to assist press people. There should be a sign-in sheet with “name of reporter” “media outlet” and “phone number” and “email” written in columns at the top. Each reporter who signs in should be given a press kit.

Step Ten: Follow-up

Don’t let the story end on the day of your event. Make copies of any stories about your event that appear in print and circulate them to your Board, funders, parents and potential foster parents. Assign people to monitor local TV news shows and tape any stories that appear about your event. Keep those tapes to show at any fundraisers, orientations or meetings you have in the future.

Call or write and thank the media folks who helped spread the word about your event. A thank you is a powerful thing. Let them know how their efforts at covering the event will impact children referred in the future, and by bringing parents to your agency who may never have considered becoming foster parents. Stay in contact with reporters who attended your event or produce stories. You might want to contact them in efforts to do future stories. Maintaining that relationship once the event is over will help you the next time you are looking for some publicity.

SAMPLE PRESS ADVISORY from the “May is Foster Care Month Toolkit”

(on your letterhead)

Press Advisory

April 20, 2004

Contact: Martha Willow

234-555-6789 (day)

234-555-9876 (eve.)

Community-Wide Celebration of Bay City Foster Families Planned for May 6 During National Foster Care Month

Bay City will join communities across the country in celebrating National Foster Care Month in May by holding a pancake breakfast to honor the 97 foster families in Bay City. Everyone is invited to attend and to sign a giant thank-you card for the families. Among the speakers is Mayor Bill Steinberg; Kate McKenney, director of Bay City Foster Families United; and Regina St. Clair, former foster child and currently Foster Home Coordinator, Child and Family Services Division, Bay City Department of Human Services.

WHEN: Saturday, May 2, 2003

9:00 a.m. – 10:30 a.m.

WHERE: Bay City Middle School Cafeteria

4521 Maple Street

NOTE: If you would like to arrange in advance to interview any of the speakers listed above, please call Martha Willow at 234-555-6789. If you would like information about National Foster Care Month, please call Martha at the number above.

Foster Family-Based Treatment Association Member Agency

SAMPLE NEWS RELEASE edited from the “May is Foster Care Month Toolkit”

(on your letterhead)

News Release

May 5, 2004 (write either “for immediate release” or “for release on....” and list a date)

Contact: Martha Willow

234-555-6789 (day)

234-555-9876 (eve.)

BAY CITY COMMUNITY GATHERED TO HONOR FOSTER FAMILIES WHO BRIGHTEN CHILDREN’S LIVES

Local Event is Part of National Foster Care Month

Bay City... On May 2, Bay City joined with thousands of communities across the country in celebrating the loving, caring adults who open their homes and hearts to children in foster care. As part of National Foster Care Month, several hundred Bay City residents attended a pancake breakfast at Bay City Middle School to thank the 97 foster families in their community.

“People who become foster parents do so out of love and compassion,” said Mayor Bill Steinberg, who presented a proclamation declaring May Foster Care Month. “Take some time this month to thank these wonderful families who provide homes and love to children who need them.”

Regina St. Clair is a former foster child and currently serves as Foster Home Coordinator, Child and Family Services Division, Bay City Department of Human Services. She told the gathering about her five years in foster care, and how her foster family gave her the confidence to pursue her dream of getting a degree in social work. She also said, “Show you care for all children whose parents cannot care for them – find out how you can make a difference for a Bay City child in foster care.”

Several of the foster parents who were being honored said that it was an honor simply to make a difference in the life of a child. At least two-thirds of the foster parents in attendance said that they plan to be foster parents for many more years.

Many of the people at the breakfast signed a giant thank-you card that expressed appreciation for the foster parents’ involvement. Leslie Jones, owner of Bay City’s Pizza Barn, gave all the foster families coupons for free pizzas during the month of May. Anyone interested in learning how to become a licensed foster parent should call Regina St. Clair at 234-555-6767

“Become a foster parent – it’s one of the most rewarding opportunities available. As a trained foster parent, you could have a positive and long-lasting impact on the life of a child,” said foster parent Marshall Hunter. “Bay City needs to make sure there will always be enough loving foster families.”

Foster Family-Based Treatment Association Member Agency