

Volunteering across the Generations

Volunteer Awareness Week: 20-26 June 2010



Tip sheet 2: Using the media to promote volunteering

People's perceptions can put them off volunteering. They may feel that they don't have time. They may associate volunteering with a different age group or section of the community to their own. Or they may not be aware of the wide range of opportunities that exist. *(Some people already volunteer and don't realise that is what they are doing – they just think of it as 'helping out' or 'doing their duty'!)*

The media is an important way to help people understand the benefits that volunteering offers. It can create enthusiasm for the wide range of volunteering opportunities and encourage more people to take part.

You can use the media to help inform people's views about volunteering by:

- * highlighting the wide range of activities that take place – for example, focus on an unusual or new activity that people wouldn't normally associate with your organisation
- * showing how all sorts of people of all ages and all backgrounds take part – perhaps an older person doing an activity normally associated with younger people or vice versa
- * using case studies that illustrate the different ways that people benefit – such as an unemployed person who has used their volunteering experience to get a job in their chosen field.

This will help your organisation involve more people – but it will also help to ensure that people have a broader view of volunteering in general.

As well as explaining how potential volunteers can get involved, try to weave some key messages about the benefits of volunteering into your communication with the media. You can do this by thinking about what you say in press releases or in the illustrations you choose.

Key messages could include:

- * All types of different people volunteer - everybody has something to contribute.
- * Volunteering can be enjoyable and interesting (and fun).
- * There are all sorts of different roles for volunteers. There are opportunities as great as your imagination.
- * Volunteering is about giving time and getting involved, but you get something back too. (eg: learn new skills, increase confidence, gain a sense of belonging, build up your CV and increase your employability, etc).

- ★ VAW 2010 focuses on volunteering across the generations – showcasing volunteering as a way in which everyone no matter of age is able to go and serve the community.

The hardest part about getting media coverage can be getting a journalist interested in the first place. The following are some basic tips that might help you get coverage.

- ★ **Target the right media:** Make sure you know the target audience of the media you are contacting. Local community newspapers want to write about people who live in their communities – choose a colourful local character. Regional and national media are interested in stories with some wider scope applicable beyond the boundaries of your local county.
- ★ **Identify your 'news' angle:** What is special, different or unusual about what you have to say? If you can use words like 'first ever', 'oldest', 'biggest', 'youngest', 'only', 'one of a kind', 'innovative', etc to describe your news, then it's more likely to be of interest. The news can be about your staff, volunteers, clients, but also about you headquarters, equipment, donations and anything else that makes your organisation run. There could be more than one news story to attract the journalist.
- ★ **Release the facts:** Media likes numbers, especially if they are about something local in their area. Try to gather statistics about your work and have them public for the Week. (e.g. how did demand for your services increase since the beginning of the economic crisis, how many trainings you have organised, how many people used your services in last 12 months)
- ★ **Involve a star:** Inviting a local dignitary or an honourable person from the NZ public to attend and participate in your event will attract media attention. You might ask a local MP or Mayor to deliver a speech on the opening ceremony or a popular sportsman/woman to present the Certificates of Appreciation to your volunteers.
- ★ **Join the forces:** See which organisation or community group covers similar services and shares common goals with you. Ask them to approach the media together come out with a shared story or event – your voice will be heard further! If you are a local branch, check out with your head office to make sure you coordinate and streamline the message.
- ★ **Get to the point quickly:** Put your 'big news' right up the front of your media release – don't bury it at the end. If you're not a confident writer, then give the journalist a call and tell them your 'news' in person. Make sure you prepared some dot points with the facts about your story and are able to communicate them clearly to the journalist.
- ★ **Think about deadlines:** Give the journalist lots of notice and find out when they publish. (eg: a weekly or monthly publication might need the information in advance, so they can cover your story in a timely manner.)

- * **Offer an 'exclusive' angle:** The media are less likely to cover something that other media have already covered, so try and identify a unique story or photo that you can offer. Invite a journalist for the photo opportunity.
- * **Pick the right 'talent' for live interviews:** The hardest-working volunteer isn't always the best choice for a face-to-face interview – they may not have much to say, or be shy or nervous. Whoever is being interviewed, it's always a good idea to practice what you have to say and think about what questions might be asked and what your answers might be!
- * **Be topical – link your news to current issues:** How is the work of your organisation relevant to today's society and what's currently in the headlines? Browse through the media and identify issues the work of your organisation tackles. This year you might think of how does the current economic crisis affect your work? How do your organisation's activities help the people troubled by the economic crisis? Is there any new government policy affecting your activities? How do you impact the integration of refugees and migrants into the mainstream New Zealand? How do you foster stronger civil participation of youth and baby-boomers?

If the media don't pick up on your news story, you can always get your message out in other ways. You could submit an article for the company newsletter where a volunteer works, publish it on your website, send it to a specialist magazine, tweet on Tweeter, create a 'Causes' or 'Event' page on Facebook and invite followers and participants or, even write it as a letter to the editor.