

The Branch Press and Publicity Officer

Being the branch press officer can be great fun - and if you follow some very simple guidelines it needn't take up too much time and can be very effective in raising the profile of the NCT.

The job of the branch press officer is to get as much free publicity for the branch and the NCT as possible, in the local paper, or on local radio or television. The power of local media is sometimes undervalued. Did you know that 87% of people in the UK read their local paper? Or that 70% listen to their local radio station?

To be a press officer all you need is an outgoing personality, the ability to talk openly and persuasively, a really good knowledge of what the NCT does, and a good contact book containing the telephone numbers of branch volunteers who can talk about specific subjects.

How Do I Let The Local Media Know What We Are Doing?

Firstly, always ring and introduce yourself. Leave your number and say that you will always try to help them with questions about pregnancy, birth and early parenthood, or that if you can not help you will find someone who can.

Then, when you have something to publicise, let them know by sending a press release. There is no mystique about what is needed to make a good news release - it is simply information. When you have gathered your information you must then put it into a form that journalists can use quickly and without too much effort.

It is important to remember that newspapers get literally hundreds of press releases every day. Your release stands a much better chance of being looked at if it is presented in a way that is easy to read and easy for the journalist or editor to work on. Get to know the golden rules:

- don't send a press release unless you have something to say
- the first paragraph is the most important - this decides whether or not the editor reads on
- ensure you mention Who, What, When and Why into the first paragraph - and How into the next
- use headed paper, typed text, and make sure the press release contains contact names, follow up phone numbers and an address - and don't forget to date it
- type (never handwrite) on one side of the sheet only
- try to include a quote from someone local
- short sentences and short paragraphs are a must

When you have sent your press release to the local paper, don't then forget about it. Ring up to make sure that it has been received and make personal contact with the journalist.

If you are asking a journalist to come along to an event, make sure that the event has a photo opportunity. Pictures are absolutely vital. If you can provide a good photo opportunity you will nearly always get your event covered.

If the journalist does not turn up to your event ring him/her and say what happened, how many people were there, etc. If you have a good photograph of the event send that in. Don't delay. Something that happened two weeks ago is not news.

What About A Photo Call?

This is a good idea, so long as you are absolutely sure that you have the makings of a good photograph. To make your local paper sit up and take notice your picture must say and do something interesting. If you are convinced you have a good picture story, send your press release to the local newspaper picture editor, as well as the newsdesk. Telephone them to talk them through the picture. Take advice if they say 'sounds good but it would be better done this way'. Babies and toddlers nearly always make a good picture - so you are halfway there already. Pictures should almost always be taken outside.

What About Local Radio?

Local radio is great. Journalists and anchor people are always keen to portray local people and organisations in the best light. They are also really keen to invite organisations that can help and inform others on to talk shows.

Drop a note to the head of programming telling him/her who you are, what you can talk on, and how to get in touch with you. When you have got something to publicise, once again, send in a press release, just as you would to a newspaper, only send it to News Intake. Follow up your press release with a call.

Some tips to help you get your story covered and to help you (or someone else in the branch) with an interview:

- send your press release to the News Intake desk a few days in advance
- make sure you have someone prepared to do an interview
- if you are asking a radio reporter to come to an event make sure there are plenty of background 'noise choices' - these will make the interview come to life
- if you are asked to do an interview in the studio try to do it - it sounds much better than a telephone interview
- ask the researcher or reporter in advance what questions are likely to be asked and who else will be on the programme
- if it is an interview on a serious subject, be prepared and be brief - decide on three points and make them no matter what
- don't ramble or use jargon - it can be boring
- don't be argumentative - ordinary people are listening to you in their living rooms, kitchens or cars
- don't be pompous

What About Television?

You really need to have an excellent visual story before television will be interested. Fundraising events are almost always out unless you can get a famous personality along to support your event. If you do get interest from television, please ring the press office at UK Office to talk through the story. The press officer will be able to give you lots of advice and tips. If you or someone else from your branch is invited on to television:

- don't agree to an interview unless you know what you are going to be talking about
- don't fudge or avoid questions - a good interviewer always comes back
- don't fiddle or swivel to and fro in your chair - it can be distracting
- don't use jargon
- don't wear fussy clothes / loud scarf / dangling earrings - it can be distracting
- remember the camera crew is as important as the interviewer - you are potentially always in view

What About If The Media Call Me?

As the branch press officer you may get calls from newspapers, radio or television for your reaction to a story that has broken locally, or even nationally:

- never react immediately, even if you are told that they need an answer straight away - say that you will ring them back in five minutes
- if you are worried call the NCT press office for advice - someone there will talk you through it or telephone the newspaper or radio station to deal with the journalist
- if you think another branch volunteer might be the best person to talk to, ring her and ask her to deal with the journalist
- if you decide you can deal with the matter yourself, make sure you are briefed and ring the

- journalist back
- try not to talk to journalists on the telephone if your children are in the room - it will only distract you and the journalist
 - if the radio want to interview over the phone make sure you are in a quiet room
 - please never say anything is NCT policy unless you have first checked with UK Office

Anything Else?

If a press officer from UK Office telephones you, please try to help. It may sometimes be inconvenient, but the press officer is doing his or her best to get the NCT into the news and may need people to share their experiences with others. In return, the press office is always happy to help you in any way it can. We can look at your draft press releases, help you if you are going for an interview, or if you have a problem.