

Strategies for dealing with the media (from Carol Goar).

Presented at June'06 Poverty Workshop organized by Cambridge & NDumfries Social Planning Council www.socialplanningcouncil-cnd.org

Good Ideas:

- *Take advantage of news events* – federal, provincial and municipal budgets, the launching of food bank drives, the release of poverty statistics, local charity campaigns – to tell your story. That's when journalists will be most open to hearing it.

- *Make sure you have something to say.* The fact that Canada's poverty rate is still unacceptably high is lamentable, but it isn't new. Find something to say that people don't already know.

- *Put a human fact on the issue.* This can be difficult because you don't want to exploit low-income people or violate their privacy. But, for example, if you can find social assistance recipients or single mothers who can't afford groceries, it will have a much more powerful impact than facts and figures.

- *Be as concrete and specific as you can.* How much does an individual living on social assistance get? (\$536. for an individual, \$987 for a single parent with child). What is the average rent for an apartment in Cambridge? How much does that leave for groceries? That will have a much more powerful impact than facts and figures.

- *Work together.* When social activists, housing advocates, child care proponents, food bank workers, churches and charities forge alliances, they are much more effective than when they speak individually.

- *Figure out who covers social issues in local media* (in some cases, there won't be anybody because the staff is too small). If there is a journalist who is open to stories about the disadvantaged, help him or her as much as you can.

- *Be patient.* Building contacts and consciousness takes time.

Bad Ideas

- *Don't inundate the media* with non-stop request for coverage. Pick your times and spots.

- *Don't use guilt* to get a reporter to write about poverty. Most have limited control over their assignments. Moreover, they'll stop taking your calls.

- *Don't assume* that everybody knows the extent and seriousness of poverty in this country or this community. Lots of people don't.

- *Don't ignore or belittle progress* in the fight against poverty. Celebrate it, no matter how minimal it is, but use it to put the extent of the problem in perspective.

- *Don't rely on national or provincial poverty figures if you can get local ones.* People need to understand that it's their neighbours who are affected, not just strangers in downtown Toronto or on an out-of-sight native reserve.

- *Don't give up.* There will be disappointments and setbacks and stories that fall through.