

Kentuckians for Nursing Home Reform

Media Relations

Kentuckians for Nursing Home Reform consider media relations one of the most important things we do. One of our main missions is to educate the public about important issues facing nursing home care. When an important issue comes up, or there is something in the newspaper about an issue, we give our side of the story – or we expand on the story – by writing an op-ed page piece for the two major newspapers in Kentucky. We never, however, send the same article to both newspapers. A good way to start your op-eds is to first visit the editorial page editor and get from him or her the guidelines you should follow, such as recommended number of words, and take that opportunity to relate to the editor just what your organization is all about. Don't just surprise an editorial page editor with an article from someone he or she has never heard of.

We sometimes do letters to the editor, when the commentary can be short and to the point. Again, know to whom your letter should be sent and the guidelines for letters. We also encourage our supporters to write letters to the editor. We even offer to help them with their letter just for the asking.

We also do news releases and media advisories on a wide range of topics, but often we localize a national story on nursing home care and tell how it affects Kentucky, and who the newspaper can interview to get the local angle. If it is a breaking story, we may just call the editor or reporter we think would be interested. News releases and media advisories are sent to a large number of print, radio and television contacts. We always make sure we are available to answer questions or to comment ourselves on any news release.

We also follow a long-time practice of ours which we call "Take An Editor to Lunch." This involves taking a newspaper editor or a television station news director to lunch. Purpose of the lunch is simply to get acquainted and to establish a connection between you and your organization with the editor. But the main rule here is: Never pitch a story. Resist the temptation and leave that alone until you have established a relationship and then you will have better success when you do ask the editor to accommodate you by running or broadcasting something you really want.

Communicating With Our Supporters

We have been doing a newsletter and sending it by email to our supporters for many years. You can see copies of the current newsletter and all previous ones by going to our Web site <http://www.KyNursingHomeReform.org>.

We do our newsletter by email because it is too expensive to print and mail. We do, however, mail about 150 of them a month to persons who want to get it but do not have access to a computer. A supporter does this for us as her contribution to our cause.

Some suggestions for newsletters by email:

1. Don't make them too long. Make each item in the newsletter as short as possible.
2. Make each item pithy and hard-hitting.
3. Put a catchy headline on each item.
4. Don't have columns in your email newsletter like you do in a printed version. These are hard to read because when you finish column one, you have to go back to the top of the page. People are in a hurry.
5. Add a touch of humor. We have a "P.S." item in our newsletter which is a joke someone sent us. We get dozens of jokes submitted. And now and then someone will say, "I always go to the joke first." I am not sure we like that, but at least they are looking at our newsletter.
6. We may also start a recipe exchange.
7. We have organizations that support us by including our newsletter on their listserv which almost doubles our circulation.
8. ConstantContact.com distributes our newsletter and they are excellent.

Volunteer Alerts

Let's say an important bill is coming up in the state legislature and we want our supporters to contact their lawmakers and urge their support. To do this, we do a *Volunteer Alert*. This is an email, just like our newsletter, that we can zip out to our supporters to urge them to get on the telephone or get to the state capital to see their lawmaker. We do this on national developments, too, in Congress and especially when NCCNHR asks for our help. Our supporters made a lot of calls to Washington to urge supporters for the Health Care Reform bill that contained many things of favor to nursing home reform.

Bernie Vonderheide

Founder of Kentuckians for Nursing Home Reform

(859) 312-5617