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activate

The quarterly
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the Institute
for Media, Policy
and Civil Society
Summer 2000



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Countering media stereotypes the non-profit way

activate

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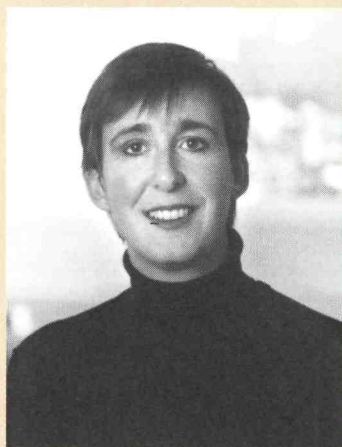
from the editor

As the Director of Training & Publications, I speak to and meet hundreds of people every year who work with non-profits – people who are committed to making our communities, provinces, country and world a safer, more just place to live. As a parent, this contact gives me hope that the world my son is growing up in is *not* as simple or as corrupt as the world we see represented on CNN.

I recently heard an interesting sound collage on CBC Radio, of speakers at a symposium on globalization and art. One person spoke of the difference between images created by the media and those created as art. She suggested that the images that the media represent are about 'the general', are stereotypes, and that artistic images are about representing 'the particular'. I believe that there is truth to this statement, and that this truth has relevance to anyone who works on social justice issues.

Consider typical media images of poverty: single mom with 'too many' kids surrounding her, children in dirty clothes, run-down apartment complexes in the inner-city. These stereo-typical images don't show us the particulars of the situation: the single mom in her fast-food uniform on the rush-hour bus; the kids in dirty clothes standing beside their Prairie-farmer parents; or the university classrooms across the country, where the young people who live in cheap apartments spend their days, trying to break free of their current low-income situation.

And stereotypical images of people who live in poverty in developing countries are even more damaging and misleading, because the majority



of Canadians simply don't have any first-hand experience to counter them. Can it be that all Africans suffer from malnutrition, dehydration, impacts of war and diseases like AIDS? Well, if your media diet consists only of news such as that shown on CNN, then it's hard to believe otherwise.

In this issue of *Activate* we look at poverty as a case study for how important it is for non-profits to communicate about the particulars of their issue and to start to address the widely accepted generalizations used every day in the media. Poverty is the case study – the tools and ideas are relevant regardless of whether you work on saving species habitat or promoting the rights of women and children. Recognizing a problem is the first step to solving it ...

DONNA BARKER / EDITOR

Poverty is the case study – the tools and ideas are relevant

regardless of whether you work on saving species habitat or promoting the rights of women and children.

● BY AMANDA GIBBS

Heroines

Photographer Lincoln Clarkes used to work the fashion runways of Paris.

He's also known for his portraits of high-powered celebrities and elegant nudes. But for the last few years, he's turned his lens to an epic project that documents chilling social ills. "Heroines", Clarkes' on-going photo essay of female heroin addicts, has transmitted images of

women from Canada's poorest postal code – Vancouver's Downtown Eastside – to the rest of the country and the world.

Clarkes now lives and works in this urban neighborhood that houses one of the highest rates of HIV infection in the world – a place where intravenous drug-use routines claim lives and where rampant poverty and crime offer few

Clarkes uses his images to mobilize public opinion – to show the world we're allowing something terrible to happen.



From the "Heroines" series by Lincoln Clarkes

options for escape. Clarkes was spurred on by the knowledge that the rest of the city and the rest of Canada had been insulated from their intensity and despair; that these problems had been effectively ghettoized and warehoused within the area's mean streets.

So he began to take photos of some of the women he's seen and met – friends, neighbours and passers-by – who all have one thing in common: their addiction to heroin and crack cocaine. The women are captured with a surprising rawness. We see the scars and tracks in their arms and the sores on their faces. Some are mired in sadness. Others appear lonely and bored. Each photograph tells a compelling story.

"Most of these women are from small towns in BC, Quebec and Ontario. About 90 per cent were abused as children, and most are using (heroin) to numb their pain and to disappear. I want the world to see these photographs so more people don't end up down there," says Clarkes of the close to 300 women he has photographed. These images have been displayed in gallery shows, in public service announcements, and even in outreach material produced by Vancouver Centre Member of Parliament, Libby Davies. International press agency Reuters and newspapers across Canada and the US have also picked up the story of "Heroines", drawing attention to the urgent need for solutions and support. (A portion of the monies raised from the sales of these photos goes to the Downtown Eastside Women's Shelter.)


Though some critics have decried the series as exploitative, Clarkes says the women themselves respond enthusiastically to his request to



From the "Heroines" series by Lincoln Clarkes

photograph them. "The photos are often the only trace left of some incredibly fragile lives." And he is able to use the images to mobilize public opinion – to show the world we're allowing something terrible to happen. These women point to the need for better detox services, more support for users who are trying to get clean, and a stronger social safety net for those most at risk.

"The best way I can help people, is to take their photo. Most people avert their eyes if they happen to see these women in the street. I am taking these photographs so that people can't help but pay attention."

For more information about the "Heroines" series or about Vancouver's Downtown Eastside, contact Lincoln Clarkes at 604-255-1992 or by email at kissmyeyes@visto.com. 

A Cup of Joe with

By looking to the model used by the *in common* campaign, non-profits can learn a great deal about how to launch a successful outreach campaign.

Your campaign isn't too big: you simply want to change the world – or some small part of it. Every non-profit with an advocacy goal faces a similar challenge – how to get masses of people mobilized to effect change. Imagine your goal was as lofty as eradicating global poverty ... where in the world would you start? If you are the staff of the Canadian Council for International Cooperation's (CCIC) *in common* campaign, you start with a plan. In CCIC's case, it was a concrete anti-poverty action – urging its members to switch to fair trade coffee in their offices.

In 1998, CCIC launched *in common*, a public education campaign to help Canadians better address issues of poverty both here and abroad. The campaign identified ten areas that needed to be addressed in order to achieve the elimination of world poverty. Their ten point agenda outlines very broad objectives, such as “promoting sustainable development” and “upholding human rights”.

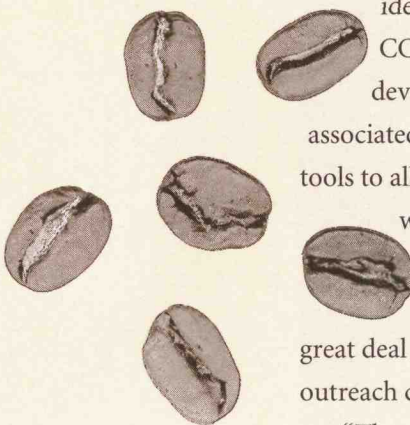
So, how can a coalition organization with a goal as huge as ending global poverty, and objectives as broad as “building peace”, begin to tackle the task ahead of them? By developing a strategic communications plan that includes identifying specific target audiences (in CCIC's case, their 100 member agencies), developing achievable outcomes with associated timelines, and conceiving of concrete tools to allow others to help them implement the work with a shared vision. By looking to the model used by the *in common* campaign, non-profits can learn a great deal about how to launch a successful outreach campaign.

“Through the *in common* campaign, we are

trying to make what we stand for – social justice, equity and collective action for change – tangible and easily identifiable. *In common* has proven to be a helpful frame of reference that decision-makers can use to relate to NGOs as a community. Another plus is the opportunity it creates for new initiatives. As a result of the *in common* coffee break initiative, CCIC is working with its members in new ways,” says Alain Roy, Communications Co-ordinator at CCIC.

One of the strengths of the *in common* campaign is that it successfully took a huge issue – the eradication of poverty – and broke it into pieces that your average coffee drinking Canadian can both understand and act on. Following are some ideas from the Fair Trade Coffee campaign that you could customize for your own outreach and education campaigns. For specific information about Fair Trade Coffee and how you can get involved in helping some of the world's poorest people create a better life, visit www.incommon.web.net

- Create **Camera-ready Ads** about your issue that supporters can place in workplace newsletters, in other non-profit's newsletters and in community newspapers (often at no charge when the paper has a small hole to fill).
- Produce **Flyers** that invite individuals and organizations to get involved in your issue and enlist their constituencies to support your work.
- Develop a **10 to 15 minute Slide or PowerPoint Presentation** (that fits cunningly into office coffee break time) comprised of original illustrations and photographs that clearly show why your issue is important, who your issue affects, and concrete steps individuals can take to help alleviate the problem.



a Conscience

Use this short presentation to educate members of your local Chamber of Commerce, Lion's Club or Church Women groups at their monthly meeting.

- Reproduce the slide/PowerPoint presentation on **Poster Boards**. Simply enlarge and mount your slides for presentations in workplaces, at fairs and special events, in malls and other settings. Mail the poster boards to members and supporters to conduct their own educational presentations. Well-designed poster boards can be used as wall displays at almost any important meeting with decision-makers, to maximize impact.
- **Information Fact Sheets** can be produced very inexpensively. Photocopied on 11" by 17" sheets, one side could provide important information about your issue, the other side could be designed as a poster for schools, church, temple or synagogue bulletin boards, doctor and dentist offices, and other places where people gather ... make it a bit smaller and print it on absorbent newsprint-style paper for a local restaurant to use as placemats. Write the copy in quiz style, with questions on one side and answers on the reverse to appeal to the portion of your constituency who want to be millionaires.
- Create a **Photo Exhibit** of images

about your issue – both the problem and solutions – to place in a local art gallery, café gallery, community centre, place of worship hall, or in a supportive business.

- A **Video** about your issue need not be produced by your group to achieve the education and motivation purposes you seek. Check out the National Film Board's catalogue of documentaries on the issue you address. Get in touch with Vision TV, CBC TV and cable broadcasters to find out if they have films about your issue. If they do, ask for the producer's contact information. If the producer felt strongly enough to make a film on the topic, odds are he will be happy to share his film for non-profit educational purposes at little or no charge. Show the film to small groups of people in your home. Have other supporters arrange screenings in their homes.
- If possible, develop an **Interactive Website** that lists all the tools you have available, how much they cost and how people can access them.
- Be sure to network with other NGOs who are also working on the same or related issues so you can co-host events.

A well-planned public outreach campaign takes time and money. Be prepared and willing to reflect this work in your annual budget and your staff and volunteer workloads.

Isn't it time for
a really good cup
of coffee?



All of us are trying to make the world a better place.

Here's a simple, practical way to make a real difference. **Switch to Fairtrade coffee.** Fairly traded coffee prevents the exploitation of coffee workers and growers. It ensures they earn a decent living and supports environmentally friendly growing practices. Unfortunately most of the coffee we drink comes from multinational corporations that control 70% of the industry and contribute to almost 10 million coffee workers living in extreme poverty.

Consumers are at the end of an unfair chain. We can help break that chain. Be a part of the **in common Coffee Break.**

Call 1-888-647-4141
or visit www.incommon.web.net
to find the Fairtrade coffee retailer nearest you.

in common
Global Action
Against Poverty

A Campaign coordinated by the
Canadian Council for International Co-operation

This ad was downloaded
from the *in common* website.

Empowerment through Knowledge

BY GISÈLE MORIN-LABATUT

CANADIAN PARTNERSHIPS,
INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT RESEARCH CENTER

Some years ago, a Canadian researcher studying livelihoods in the informal sector, in a spontaneous settlement of a major West African city, was surprised to learn that the inhabitants identified the construction of a mosque as the single greatest need of the community, ahead of a project that might have met more immediate economic needs.

While the images of poverty conjured in the minds of most people are of physical deprivation – a woman surrounded by hungry-looking children standing in front of a dilapidated urban dwelling, for example – the problems are complex and touch every aspect of life, limiting options and therefore control over people's destinies.

People living in poverty often have a solid grasp of political realities and power relations, and understand that the issues cannot be addressed piecemeal, but require a more strategic or systematic approach. The researcher came to realize what the community knew very well: that a place of worship conveys legitimacy to a settlement, making it harder for authorities to relocate the population. Without this legitimacy, the very existence of the community was at risk.

Individually, disciplines such as economics or agronomy are inadequate in confronting many of the challenges faced by lower-income countries. Interpreting its mission – “empowerment through knowledge” – in a non-sectoral manner, IDRC has chosen to address the inequalities of access to social, environmental and economic goods and services that characterize poverty in lower-income countries by supporting problem-oriented research. The research is multi-disciplinary and often involves government and civil society organizations as well as academic institutions.



Daniel Buckles

In Tangail, Bangladesh, the knowledge that women, like Rabaya, have of local seeds translates into greater power and status within the household because of the seeds' importance to farming communities. That same knowledge is being harnessed in an IDRC supported project to ensure that local seed supplies can compete with exotic (or foreign) sources.

IDRC also supports small research activities that encourage Canadians to address environmental and socio-economic issues of global import, such as labor conditions in the garment industry, the effects of mining on indigenous communities, or the implications of free trade for sustainable and equitable development. Communities and organizations in the South thus become actors of their own development rather than mere beneficiaries of aid, and can work in collaboration with partners in the North to solve problems that concern us all.

To learn more about IDRC, visit www.idrc.ca 

People living in poverty often have a solid grasp of political realities and power relations, and understand that the issues cannot be addressed piecemeal, but require a more strategic or systematic approach.

Making the News: A Media Relations Manual for Non-profit Organizations

JOHN LONGHURST, AUTHOR

Since starting with IMPACS over 2 years ago, I have had dozens, if not hundreds, of people ask me to recommend a good introductory media relations book. I looked for suitable Canadian resources and came up short, sending people to a handful of U.S. titles written on the topic. But, sending folks state-side is over!

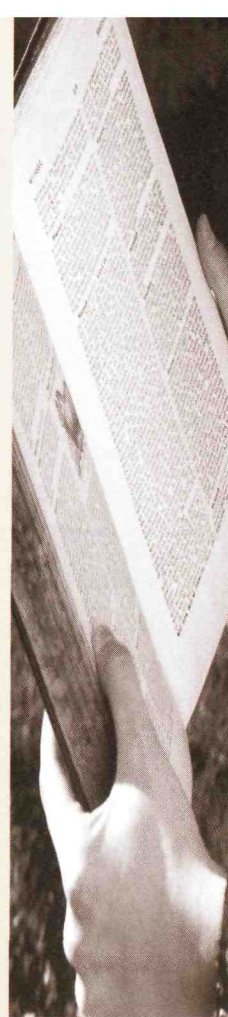
Making the News, by Winnipeg-based John Longhurst (not to be confused with Making the News by U.S.-based Jason Salzman) is the resource I've been looking for. In 75 jargon-free pages, Making the News covers all of the basics of building a relationship with the media. In chapters titled 'the Media', 'the Press Release', 'the Interview', 'Other Media Opportunities', and my favorite chapter, appropriately called 'Miscellaneous Information', Longhurst provides no-nonsense, concrete guidance to anyone faced with the often

overwhelming task of getting a story in the news.

The majority of case studies come from the author's direct experience as the Director of Media Relations and Marketing for the Mennonite Central Committee – a job he handled for some 12 years. They are concrete, visual and relevant to most any non-profit.

Making the News, with its sound advice and tips of the trade, is must-have reading for anyone who deals with the media in their job. And, it's only \$6.95! If your organization doesn't have the budget to buy this book, then I suggest you pack a sandwich for lunch tomorrow and send the money you saved not eating out to Windflower Communications. Buy this book yourself! It's a wonderful resource. "Two microphones up!"

To order Making the News, contact Windflower Communications at 1-800-465-6564.



Famine Pornography

Excerpted from *Making the News* by John Longhurst

Many non-profit organizations assist people who have needs. In order to create awareness about these people and provide assistance for their needs, it is necessary to talk about them to generate interest and funds. But how groups talk about the individuals they support is just as important as the end result of providing the assistance. Communication efforts should, of course, avoid the use of language and images which range from the insensitive to what is called poverty or famine pornography.

A 1990 Angus Reid survey of Canadian attitudes towards international development assistance found that after years of seeing mostly negative images of crises in the developing world, many Canadians have developed a sense of hopelessness. The survey suggested that while the media has contributed to this hopelessness, the relief and development community is itself responsible for some of this fatigue.

About relief agencies, the pollster said: "Much of their past communication efforts have focused

on the horrible situations in some of the poorer countries of the world. They have constantly reminded people of how serious the situation is. This is an important step in creating awareness. However, after years of exposure to these heart-wrenching messages, and no apparent success in alleviating any of these problems, people lose hope, and then interest."

What is true for international development assistance is true for other issues involving poor or marginalized people in Canada and the USA. But how can you make sure that your communities avoid sending unintentional negative messages about the very people you wish to assist?

- **Watch your language.** How do you talk about the people you are trying to assist? Shorthand expressions like "the hungry," "disabled" or "the poor" run the risk of objectifying human beings. They are "hungry people," "people with disabilities" or "poor people." This reminds us all that we are talking about people, not economic or physiological categories.

- **Think about the words you use to describe what you do.** Do you only "help" others? Or do you "work with" others also? How you describe your efforts can go a long way towards affirming the strength and dignity of others, or it can cast them as pathetic victims dependent on aid.
- **Ask the people for whom you advocate how they would like to be described.** Nothing beats going directly to the source. If in doubt, ask someone from the group you are advocating to read your press release; he or she will catch any words that may cause you embarrassment.

Finally, develop guidelines to govern the way you report about others. Some agencies have developed codes of conduct about the way they will report about and portray the people they are trying to assist. Two groups which have done this recently are Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) and the Inter-Church Coalition on Africa. You can access a copy of the MCC guidelines at www.mcc.org/misc/reporting-code.html.

Framing a Picture of Development

BY MIKE CRAWLEY

There are ways
to frame
development
issues as
news stories
and
get the
attention
of
journalists.

Development issues don't rank very high on the Canadian news agenda. From the perspective of the editors, it's easy to see why. Editors will point out that development has little impact on the lives of their target audience, the average Canadian. Development is a slow process, so there's little "new" that fits the definition of news. It also takes place overseas, and covering foreign stories is expensive. Nor does development qualify as a big ticket item to taxpayers in the federal budget. But none of this is a reason for people who work in the development sector to give up on trying to obtain media coverage. There are ways to frame development issues as news stories and get the attention of journalists.

Here are some tips:

- When you pitch a development story to an editor, show how it is new. Explain how the project is a change from the past, demonstrates a growing trend, or has changed the lives of beneficiaries. Please make stories current: journalists roll their eyes at stories that happened months ago.
- Show how the story has an impact on Canadians' lives. Perhaps the project creates stability in a country with which Canada trades, or it helps a country that has sent a large number of immigrants or refugees to Canada.
- Make it as easy as possible for journalists to do the story. Find out if media outlets have a staff reporter or regular freelancer based near the location and offer to help arrange travel. If the story will be written from an office in Toronto or Ottawa, humanize your press release with quotes from real people affected. Provide good photos that show people doing something.

- The media is not a monolith. Seek out alternative newsweeklies, publications like *This Magazine* and *The New Internationalist*, community and college radio stations, and documentary programs that air on Vision TV, the Discovery Channel and CBC Newsworld.
- When a reporter shows an interest in development issues, cultivate a relationship. For most of the 1990s, *The Globe and Mail* actually devoted one foreign reporter to development issues. And yet any time I heard people in development circles discuss John Stackhouse, they criticized him. So my final plea goes to everyone in the non-profit sector, not just development workers. Treat a journalist the way you would like to be treated: with respect.

Back in February, I asked to meet with officials of a Canadian international development agency based in Nairobi, on a proactive hunt for interesting development stories. My reception was cold. They questioned what kind of slant I planned to take and I've yet to receive a single phone call from them with a story suggestion. This treatment makes me less sympathetic to complaints that the Canadian media ignores development stories. I'll be the first to admit that there are problems with media coverage of development. But why not take a lesson from development workers in the field who, rather than moan about a country's problems, simply roll up their sleeves and do what they can to make things better. ☺☺☺

Mike Crawley is a freelance journalist based in Nairobi. He has written stories from across East Africa for The National Post, The Toronto Star and the Christian Science Monitor. He has also conducted IMPACS workshops on media training for non-profits.

IMPACS Workshops for Non-profits



As a community organizer, you know that support from the media can make or break a campaign or special event. A good story in the paper or on local radio can increase your organization's profile, get people out to your event, draw new donors to your work, and

generally increase the credibility of your organization and the issues you address. If your non-profit has not received the public and media attention that you deserve, IMPACS media and communications skills workshops can help.

The Workshops

Be the Word on the Street Developing & Delivering Effective Messages about your Issue

You know you do important work in your community – but does the community know how valuable your organization is? If people don't know about your non-profit, finding funding and volunteers to support your activities can be difficult. In this full-day workshop, developed specifically for non-profits, you'll learn:

- How to develop the 'right' message about your organization
- Who the 'right' people are to deliver that message to
- The 'right' way to deliver that message
- The 'right' time to deliver your message

Bring examples of the messages you currently use (press releases, communications strategy, brochures) to focus test with the rest of the group.

Preparing for the Press Developing an Effective Media Plan

Does this sound familiar? A non-profit you work or volunteer with is holding a special event. Someone is given the task of writing a press release in order to get a story in the local paper. Panic ensues. Wouldn't it be nice to have a plan which outlines when to approach the media, whom to approach and why – in advance? In this full-day workshop, participants will learn:

- Why developing a media plan is important
- How to write a media plan – what goes into it and why
- Which media tools will deliver your message most effectively
- How you can make the best use of limited resources to achieve great media results

Bring your organizational activity calendar and start the work of developing your actual media plan at the workshop!

Telling Your Own Stories Writing Great Copy for Brochures, Newsletters & Promotional Materials

Newsletters. Brochures. Posters. Who needs the media when you can reach out and touch the public directly with your stellar in-house communications tools? But are your organizational 'products' as brilliant as they could be? All too often non-profits don't take full advantage of the wealth of stories and storytellers within their ranks. The do-it-yourself ethic is in full effect in this full-day workshop that shows participants how to:

- Identify the audience you want to engage and research how to reach and activate them with your materials
- Create winning strategies for the creation and distribution of communications materials
- Learn about storytelling: how to write with vitality and passion about your organization

This will be a fun, interactive and very full day! Bring samples of your current materials for feedback from the trainers.

IMPACS' trainers: Amanda Gibbs, Suzanne Hawkes and Donna Barker



For workshop dates and registration details, see the back cover.

IMPACS Workshops for Non-profits

Calendar

September

7	Thursday	Williams Lake	<i>Be the Word on the Street</i>
8	Friday	Williams Lake	<i>Telling Your Own Stories</i>
11	Monday	Prince George	<i>Telling Your Own Stories</i>
12	Tuesday	Prince George	<i>Preparing for the Press</i>
20	Wednesday	Kelowna	<i>Telling Your Own Stories</i>
21	Thursday	Kelowna	<i>Preparing for the Press</i>
25	Monday	Victoria	<i>Be the Word on the Street</i>
26	Tuesday	Victoria	<i>Telling Your Own Stories</i>
27	Wednesday	Victoria	<i>Preparing for the Press</i>
29	Friday	Terrace	<i>Be the Word on the Street</i>
30	Saturday	Terrace	<i>Preparing for the Press</i>

October

4	Wednesday	Trail	<i>Be the Word on the Street</i>
5	Thursday	Trail	<i>Preparing for the Press</i>
10	Tuesday	Vancouver	<i>Be the Word on the Street</i>
11	Wednesday	Vancouver	<i>Telling Your Own Stories</i>
12	Thursday	Vancouver	<i>Preparing for the Press</i>

For workshop descriptions, see the inside back cover.

Registration Details

Cost

One workshop: \$85 + GST = \$90.95

Two workshops: \$125 + GST = \$133.75

Three workshops: \$165 + GST = \$176.55
(Victoria and Vancouver only)

To register by phone

Pay by VISA or Mastercard, by calling toll free, 1-877-232-0122. Speak to Donna or Pat.

To register by mail

Send a cheque to 207 West Hastings Street, suite 910, Vancouver, BC, V6B 1H7. Please include the date(s) of the workshop(s) you (or others from your organization) would like to attend, the names of participants, organization affiliation (if any), address, phone, fax and email. Please make cheque payable to IMPACS.

IMPACS will contact you to confirm registration and pass on workshop venue details.



The Institute for Media, Policy and Civil Society
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