



Tip Sheet for Pitching an Interview Opportunity to Local Media for a Member of Your Self Advocacy Group / “Speechless”

One way to raise awareness about the activities of your self-advocacy group and the issues you advocate for is to pursue interview opportunities with the media in your community. Local media are always looking for interesting stories that appeal to their consumers and provide local angles to national events. With the recent buzz surrounding ABC’s new hit show “Speechless,” local media may be interested in interviewing someone from your group with Cerebral Palsy (CP).

You may have members of your group that have experience being interviewed. If not, the following provides tips for how to pursue such an interview:

1. Chose a self-advocate from your group who can provide a strong interview about living with a disability and also interject information about self-advocacy. Because we are trying to capitalize on the “Speechless” buzz, a self-advocate with CP will have the best success at landing an interview. If needed, ask your advisor, a friend, or provider for help with this project. The interviewee needs to have watched the show in order to answer questions about it. If necessary, provide a caregiver or another self-advocate who can help the reporter understand the interviewee. If being interviewed by a television reporter, suggest the reporter provide closed captioning like those used in this FCIC video (link), if necessary.

Florida Center for Inclusive Communities video:

<https://www.youtube.com/v/KVL22ASFKUg?autoplay=1&rel=0&enablejsapi=1&playerapiid=ytplayer>

2. Do your homework to learn which reporters at local newspapers, magazines, online news sources, and radio and television stations in your community write about entertainment or community news. Or, you can contact editors (print), the assignment desk (television), or news directors (radio) to pitch your idea. These are the people that assign stories to reporters. Try to learn the appropriate editor’s/reporter’s name so you can address them personally in the pitch/request for interview. Contact the person you are pitching to via telephone, email, or the organization’s social media pages. Be reasonably persistent. If they don’t respond in 48 hours, try again.
3. Start with the local television station in your area that broadcasts ABC shows. It is the most likely outlet to be interested in the interview as it will provide publicity for the show (but do not mention the “publicity” angle in your pitch. Reporters are not supposed to make decisions on a story’s newsworthiness based upon self-interest). Competing television stations (NBC, CBS, Fox) are less likely to be interested but you can try if your local ABC station is not interested. If you don’t have an ABC station in your town, pitch to your local newspaper first.

4. The Pitch. Be honest about your reason for contacting them. You have mutually compatible interests: they are trying to provide valuable and interesting content for their readers/viewers/listeners and you'd like more folks in the community to know about the good work your group is doing and the obstacles persons with disabilities face. Ask them, in light of the popularity of "Speechless," if they would like to interview a local person who has CP.
5. Think ahead of time about a location that might also serve to raise awareness about self-advocacy, inclusion, independence, or disability issues in general.
6. Dress appropriately for photographs and/or video. Even radio reporters might want to photograph you for their website.
7. Provide a fair, honest, review of "Speechless" if asked. Verbalize any negative impressions, if any, in a constructive, professional manner.
8. Anticipate questions the reporter will have and prepare brief, colorful answers. Talk about specific experiences you have had. Incorporate key facts about self-advocacy, your group, and the community issues you are advocating for into your answers. Practice with a fellow self-advocate with them performing the role of the reporter.

For Example . . .

Reporter: What is it like living with your disability?

Interviewee: (Answer to question *But one thing that helps is that I have learned to speak for myself and make decisions about my life. I am a part of a local group of self-advocates and we . . .*)

Reporter: *What are some of the obstacles you face?*

Interviewee: *In this community we need better transportation options for persons with disabilities. Some of our group members can't come to our meetings because*

9. Be sure to provide a handout (in person and emailed) to the reporter with information about your group and with details on when/where you meet and who they can contact for more information. Be sure to also direct them to the FL SAND website at www.flsand.org to learn more about self-advocacy.
10. Have reasonable expectations. Local media receive dozens of pitches a day from various people and groups and they can't respond to them all. If you are interviewed, keep in mind that only some of what you say to the reporter will be used in the story or broadcast, and quite possibly, little of what *you think* is important will air. Nonetheless, being interviewed will still raise awareness about disability issues.

11. Contact Kelli Munn at Organizational Management Solutions if you need additional help or media coaching. Email: tkgmunn@cox.net / (352) 224-0223.



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