

Tips for getting media coverage of your Direct Support Professional Recognition Week Event(s)

We celebrate Direct Support Professionals Recognition Week because we want to show our appreciation to the thousands of dedicated, hard-working DSPs we know who make community living possible for people with disabilities. We also want everyone in our communities to know and appreciate the work of our amazing DSPs, and getting local media coverage can be a way to make that happen.

Here are some hints for securing that media prize for your DSP Recognition Week event(s).

Who. Take a moment to make a list of the local media you'd like to reach with your news. Be sure to consider all the possibilities, not just television and newspapers, but also radio, magazines and any influential new media types like bloggers.

For each organization, consider where best to make your pitch. Is yours a human interest story, or is it hard news? Does it belong on the front page, or in the community living section? If you visit the specific media online, you can usually find advice from them about how to contribute a story. Take that advice.

Look for organizations that publish a community calendar and learn how you can get your event included.

Relationships. Depending on the size of the market, it can be pretty daunting reaching out to journalists you don't know. That's why, whenever possible, you want to develop relationships with key journalists – prove that you can help them – before asking them to help you.

Notice when a local journalist covers a story of interest to you. Send a quick email to congratulate them on a well-written piece. Or, share some additional information on the topic that might be interesting/useful.

In addition to getting to know your local journalists, pay attention to the types of stories that appear. When you make the pitch for your story, you'll want to present it in a way that looks similar to other stories that organization has covered.

Make your event newsworthy. As important as DSP Recognition Week is to us, your celebration may not be considered newsworthy by your local media unless you design it properly. There are a variety of ways to increase the news value of the story you want to tell. Here are a few:

- *Include celebrities.* The U.S. congress will be in session during DSP Recognition Week, so they are unlikely to be available for an event in their districts. However, there are many local elected officials and celebrities who might participate in the event. Consider the mayor, city council members, state legislators. If your event requires a master of ceremonies, consider inviting a local TV or radio personality – a beauty pageant winner, even. If there is an employer in your community who has made significant contributions

to your organization, or who has offered people with disabilities good jobs, they might also be a good candidate. In some instances the celebrity could be one or more of your DSPs. If one of them has received an award – ANCOR’s DSP Recognition Award, another award offered locally – include them.

- *Tie your event to another local news story.* If, for example, a large institution in your community has been closed, feature people with disabilities newly living in community and design an event that has them expressing appreciation for the DSPs that make community living possible for them.
- *Turn out lots of people.* If you’re celebrating by holding a community fish fry or an ice cream social – as a thank you to DSPs and a fundraiser for your organization – and you expect 500 people to turn out, mention that in your media advisory (see below). Nothing like a large crowd to bring out the journalists and cameras.
- *Partner with media.* Some local media outlets sponsor community events. Securing such a partnership could ensure you’ll have media coverage of your event.

In advance of the event. Prior to an event, send out a media advisory [include link to example]. This should answer all the w’s (who, what, why, where, when) in the most compelling language you can muster.

Prepare media packets to give to journalists who show up. This should include a copy of the advisory, a copy of the media release [link to release], brochures or other information about your organization. If you have the time and the resources, you could include a CD with images or video the journalist can use to accompany the story.

You’ll probably only need a few.

At the event. Assign someone to be on the lookout for journalists, to welcome them and to make sure they have everything they need to create a story. Offer to answer any questions they have. Introduce them to individuals who might provide interesting interviews. If the journalist has a camera, or a photographer accompanying, suggest options for securing the best photos.

After the event. Even if no journalists show up at your event, you have the possibility of getting news coverage after the fact by sending out a post-event version of the media release. Sometimes, another breaking news story will mean that a journalist who committed to your event can’t make it. Or maybe they don’t believe that 500 people will show up, but when they do, and you’ve got the photos to prove it, you may be able to spark some interest. You can email this, and include photos you took at the event. Again, offer to answer any questions or arrange interviews or help the journalist in any other way.

Additional Tips

Media coverage is not the only way to get the word out in your community about your DSP Recognition Week event. If, for example, you’re in a very small rural community, posting fliers

around town may do the trick. Think about your audience and where they get their news. Be creative.

If you're having trouble identifying or contacting journalists in your community, think about others whose help you can solicit. For example, perhaps others in your organization, your board, family members of the people you serve. All are potential resources that you can tap into.

Start small. If you've never done this before, you probably don't want to start out planning an event for 1,000 people (unless you have a good contact list and experience shows they'll turn out when you ask). But these events also take a lot of people to plan and host. Do go beyond what staff and reliable volunteers can manage. So maybe you plan something relatively small for this year, and hope to build on its success to expand in the future.