

TOP TIPS 'WILL HELP RAISE AWARENESS'



Local media is great for raising awareness as they want to cover interesting local stories, and still get read, seen, and heard by a lot of people. Newspapers (paid-for dailies, weeklies, evening and Sunday editions, and free papers which rely on advertising revenue) are a great place to start. Talk radio has hours of airtime to fill and is always looking for both topics and interviewees, while music stations have regular news bulletins to fill with local news stories. Another option is TV: both BBC and ITV have local news bulletins which cover non-national stories and often have 'And Finally' items which cover less serious stories. Many local newspapers now also publish their content online on websites like www.thisislondon.co.uk.

LOCAL PEOPLE DO AMAZING THINGS

Think about how you can make your event stand out a little or pick out the interesting news 'hook'. For example, 'charity holds local event' in itself isn't a great story. But 'Wheelchair users jump out of plane to help fund research' could be!

What are you doing? Is it interesting, unusual or wacky in any way? If people who can't walk easily are prepared to do a sponsored walk to raise awareness of their condition, then they obviously have something to say.

Why are you doing it? The human interest angle is really important for local media. If you support Ataxia UK because someone you care about has the condition, let the media know.

Who is doing it? Is there anything interesting or unusual about you or your group?

Where are you doing it? Local interest or connection is key here, so tell them exactly where you are from. Even if you are taking part in a national event such as the London Marathon your local media may be interested to hear that 'local resident takes on national challenge', for example.

When are you doing it? See our section on 'timing' to work out when best to publicise your story. Can you tie in with any existing events or awareness days like International Ataxia Awareness Day on 25 September? If so, tell your local media.

Get an angle on existing or national news

Have there been any stories in the national media recently that you have an angle on (such as disability issues or medical research, for example)?

Has your local media covered something recently that you can feed into (such as poor disability access in your town)?

Think about the photo opportunities!

Ataxia affects your mobility, so a mass rally of people with ataxia using canes, crutches, rollers and chairs makes an unusual picture. If your event is likely to make a good photo op, you might get newspaper photographers or even film cameras to come. It's happened before! Even if they don't come to the event, if you have a strong case study to interview the paper may well send a photographer out to visit them.

Remember: you don't have to wait until you have an event to look for media coverage. Even the existence of a branch can be news, if you share some of the inspiring stories of your members. Have any members achieved anything big, like winning an award or grant, or going off on the trip of a lifetime? It could all be of interest to the local papers, radio, and TV.

Good luck and remember to get in touch with us at the office if you need any help!
Ataxia UK www.ataxia.org.uk 020 7582 1444

'FIND THE RIGHT PERSON', SAYS ATAXIA UK

You may be surprised how easy it is to get your story into the local media, if you can get interesting details to the right person quickly and efficiently, and make your first contact interesting. Place a call to the newsdesk of your local paper, TV and radio stations, or send a short email explaining what's going to happen. If you send an email make sure the subject line catches their eye, for example 'local man to leap from plane', as journalists receive hundreds of emails every day and it needs to stand out. Attach (or offer to send if by phone) a copy of your press release.

Follow up efficiently

If the journalist is interested they will often call you straight away so make sure you are available to answer the phone number you gave them. Give them details briefly: who, what, why, where, and when things are happening. If there are people who can be interviewed, ask for permission in advance to put the journalist in touch with them. This will save vital time.



BE HELPFUL

Nowadays most media outlets are short on time to get good content. If you are helpful and quick you've got a good chance of placing your story. Be ready to offer interviews and picture opportunities, and also have pictures that you can send to them if they can't send a photographer.

WHAT DO YOU WANT?

Ultimately, what you're seeking from the media are three things: a mention of ataxia and what it is; a mention that there is a national charity, Ataxia UK, which is coordinating medical research into a cure and in the meantime provides support for those affected (ideally the paper will print our website address, www.ataxia.org.uk, and our helpline number, 0845 644 0606); and a mention of your branch/support group and a contact number for those who are interested in joining.

Ideally the process will go like this:

You send out your press release attached to an email with the subject along the lines of 'Local people do something interesting'.

Phone call from journalist asking: 'What is ataxia? Is there anyone we could speak to for an interview?'

You say: 'Yes of course, why not speak to Mary on 555555. She lives in Ducktown and has ataxia. You might like to know that we will have at least 20 people there on the day walking or wheeling with different forms of transport. You can find a factfile about ataxia at www.ataxia.org.uk or I can send you one'.

Don't forget to ask: If you do mention our event, we would be really grateful if you could include the website address/phone number.

ALL IN THE TIMING

Releasing your story at the right time is crucial to getting it covered. Ideally, contact all media two weeks or more before the event to see who might be interested in covering your story or pictures. One week before the event send your press release to the people you talked to before and see if they might send a reporter/photographer/camera crew. Also send your press release to general addresses like newsdesk@... to make sure it's seen by news editors in case your contact is busy. One day before the event, phone or email again, speaking to your contacts and news and picture editors if possible, to remind them of tomorrow's event/story.

If you don't get results right away...

The media is unpredictable and sometimes you can do your very best and still not get coverage. The good news is it's likely your local paper or radio will remember you the next time you get in touch. Remember local media often has lots of space to fill and will probably be glad to hear about your story, especially if it has a feel-good, human interest, or local angle.

We don't always spot stories that come up in the local media, so please do keep us updated and send us a copy for our files if you can.

Good luck and remember to get in touch with us at the office if you need any help!

Ataxia UK

www.ataxia.org.uk

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