

Sharing your story

Dealing with the media, researchers and others

Introduction

- We regularly work with the media, researchers and other organisations to help inform and raise the profile of issues that people with convictions. Often, this involves helping people to share their personal stories.
- This has been developed to provide general guidance to people with convictions thinking about sharing their personal stories. The focus is primarily on dealing with the media, but similar principles apply to taking part in research projects or sharing your story for other reasons.

Getting the story

1. What is the motivation for the piece? Usually, the media are after a particular 'story'. If they contact you, what type of 'story' is it? Is it one that you want to contribute to, or be aligned with?

Conflicting agendas

2. What you hope to achieve from getting your story published might not be the same as what they want from the piece. Different motivations isn't always a problem, but it is if they're in direct conflict.

Should you talk?

3. **Consider the situation regarding your convictions** – Are you still on licence? Although it might not be a specific restriction on your licence, you might want to speak to probation before contributing.
4. **"Stalk the stalker"** – You might want to check out their credentials, so you can find out what kind of journalist or research they are, who they work for and what kind of articles they write. This can often be done by simply typing their name into a Google search, or looking on www.journalisted.com to see if they've submitted previous articles.
5. **"Wolf in sheeps' clothing"** – Be careful of opportunities like chat shows, which might 'offer' the opportunity for you to share your side, or give a 'different perspective'. These can often end up putting individuals in uncomfortable situations.

Deadlines

6. **The media often work to tight time limits/deadlines.** This can mean that you can feel rushed. Make sure you don't feel forced to go along with their timescale. If the opportunity passes, so be it. Don't do anything until you've had proper chance to consider it.

Talking about your personal story

7. **Remember, you do not have to contribute if you don't want to** - Don't be bullied into a conversation. They can be very persuasive.
8. **Think in advance about what you want to say** - It's easy to get carried away, and feel like you've said too much. In a pre-recorded interview, you can ask to start again if you need to.
9. **Have somebody with you** - If you agree to speak face-to-face, try and arrange to have a friend or family member present as a witness.
10. **Think carefully before you part with anything** - If you decide to give photo, they are not always returned; these photos may be of great sentimental value to you. Once photos have been given to the press they are in the **public domain** and may be used without your consent at any time, possibly years into the future.
11. **Ask to see a copy of what will be published or aired** - This isn't always possible, and rarely will you get a chance to make any changes.

Exercise caution

12. **It is best to always proceed with caution** - Talk to them and find out what the story is that they want to write. Then seek advice from any charities, friends and experts that you know.
13. **Don't be bullied, rushed or dazzled by the thought of being featured in the media** - Think of the knock-on effect a story may have on your partner, children, grand-children or any other relatives. It is possible that the journalist will publish a perfect piece, but you might find the article or experience very damaging and the resulting intrusion harmful.
14. **Once it's published it's too late** - You need to be aware that, because the Press Complaints Commission (PCC) may not always uphold any complaint, once the article is published or the interview aired it is too late to heal any damage that this may cause. The PCC is a last resort, but is not to be relied upon, so make sure you think before saying anything to a journalist. Always proceed with caution.

Sharing your contact details

15. We will only put you in touch with a media contact if you say that you're happy to.
16. We will normally give you the contact details of the media contact, and suggest you contact them using a mobile, withholding your number. This puts you in control of what details to share.
17. We advise against you using your home telephone number, or in giving your home address. If you need to meet, arrange a mutually convenient public place.
18. **We normally advise against providing your genuine personal details** - this is so that you cannot be personally identified. Even if you think you'd be happy for your name to be used, think about the future online effect and the impact on your family! Normally, there's no 'added value' in using your real name.
19. As a starting point, only provide a first name (and not necessarily your real one) a mobile number, and/or a generic non-identifiable email account.