What did we learn from telling Johanna’s story?

Johanna was a part of the decision-making
We let her tell her story when she was ready, in her own way
We let her see and read the finished product – which was controversial
We spoke with experts before and during the reporting to make sure we were not causing harm

“I wanted to be fine. I wanted to be the person I was before the rape: strong, independent, proud. I wanted the rape to disappear, as though it had never happened.”
Major Headlines in Cleveland

How Media Coverage Can Help

- Help educate & raise awareness
- Positively change social norms & attitudes
- Help victims find justice
- Help the community support victims
- Push for systemic change
How Media Coverage Can Hurt
Perpetuate myths or misinformation
Get the facts wrong
Make info public that victims want private

It’s all about building relationships.

Tell the Story My Way
Setting the stage for better stories
- Meet with major media outlets before news break
- Invite reporters to your trainings, not just your fundraisers
- Be able to provide local statistics about sexual assault, not only national percentages
- Talk about what context you can provide to help stories

Talk about language
- Media outlets need to balance fairness to an accused person with sensitivity to victims
- Report or reported are good neutral option to words like “alleged” or “claimed” when talking about sexual assault. Ex: “A Cleveland woman reported she was sexually assaulted Friday evening.”
- Media accounts usually originate with police records that often contain slanted or inappropriate information about victims.

Help prepare reporters
- Discuss the array of reactions victims have to trauma that may come out as they tell their story
- Fractured narratives of victims set off alarm bells for reporters
- Explain how verbal and physical cues may be interpreted by a victim
- Discuss what questions could be victim blaming:
  - Why didn’t you fight?
  - Why didn’t you report right away?
  - How much were you drinking?

Starting a Relationship
- Start by reading/watching/listening.
- Know your target media list.
- Know what’s important to media and what makes story newsworthy.
- Be credible, reliable, accurate.
- Relationship is a 2-way street.
- Say thank you.

Responding to Media
- Keep a media inquiry log.
- Does everyone know what to do when the media calls?
- Call back immediately. Be responsive.
- Ask questions before you answer.
- Respond or not?
- 3 talking points for every interview
  - Honesty.
Proactively Communicating with Media

- The media wants to report about people, not fundraising events.
- Do your homework.
- Timing is everything.
- Press release vs. news conference vs. phone call
- Opinion pieces

Women face sexual violence amid a culture of blame -- Megan O'Bryan

Image: The Plain Dealer

Victims Decide Whether/How to Participate

- It's the victims' choice. Not the advocate's. Not the reporter's.
- Advocates job is to explain pros and cons and support victim's decision.
- Reporter's job is to explain story context and how/when published and be sensitive.

Confidentiality Case Study

Judge Orders Rape Victims to Take Polygraph Tests

"The situation made no sense to us," the mother of a 16-year-old victim said in a message relayed through Cleveland Rape Crisis Center Director of Advocacy, Ashley Hawke.

"I believe even more damage was done by the judge letting the perpetrator know he was ordering the victim to take the polygraph. He apparently took this to mean the judge did not believe her and he used this to tell their peers that the judge did not believe her and was ordering her to take a lie detector test," the mother wrote.

"It felt like the blame was back on her and she was being victimized, by not only him (again), but by the system as well."
Confidentiality Case Study

“The paper got what they needed without causing any extra stress on the family.”

Preparing Victims for Interviews

› How they want to be identified
› Communicate terms of interview
› Sometimes victims change their mind and that’s ok.
› Explain the impact of the Internet
› Can they bring support

Survivor Story Bank

Please tell us about yourself:

Name ____________________________ Date ____________________________
City/Residence ____________ Email ____________________________
Phone ____________ Age ____________

What is your relationship to the perpetrator?

☐ Grandparent ☐ Family member ☐ Child/stepchild
☐ Significant Other ☐ Parent/stepparent
☐ Sibling/step sibling
☐ Other (please specify) ____________________________

What other supporting service have you utilized? (check all that apply)

☐ Health care services ☐ Housing assistance ☐ Support groups/other counseling
☐ Legal services ☐ Other (please specify) ____________________________

What other factors have you dealt with? (check all that apply)

☐ Physical abuse ☐ Emotional abuse ☐ Sexual abuse
☐ Other (please specify) ____________________________

Would you allow your story to be used elsewhere?

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not sure (please specify) ____________________________.

Thank you for your time.

Expert Advice from Survivors

Imani Says:

› Help a survivor determine where they are in their healing journey – that should be honored
› Find out what you will be discussing ahead of time and read up on current events
› Weigh privacy against the desire to use your voice to create change
› Remember that having your story out there may not always feel comfortable, but it can be for the greater good

Garth Says:

› Have survivors set boundaries for what they will and will not talk about
› Survivors should expect and accept tears when sharing their story
› Remind survivors that they do not need to own the negativity or silence of audience members
› Triggers arise—remind survivors to take care of themselves first, the audience last

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