

DEALING WITH THE PRESS

One of the most frequent complaints we receive at Headquarters is that we do not get enough coverage by the media and particularly the Press. It is true that national newspapers rarely cover BB events unless it is bad news. They are not really interested in articles about the organisation unless it can be related to someone in the news. That is why we try to encourage ex BB members who are now in the public eye to refer to their BB background whenever possible.

At local level, however, the BB gets a considerable amount of coverage which is obvious from the press cuttings we receive each week via a press cutting agency. However, Battalions and Companies who get the best coverage have to work hard to get it. Local newspapers will not send reporters and photographers on request. They will often, however, be happy to print news and articles supplied to them so if you want good coverage then you should appoint someone in the Battalion who will supply a steady stream of news. In writing such an article you should keep it short and remember the rule '*Names sell Papers*'. Put the names of participants (Christian and Surnames), prizewinners and if the local Mayor/Provost or other local dignitary was present try to give a quote.

Press Releases can be very effective and in compiling a Press Release the following points should be borne in mind.

- Confine yourself to one side of A4 paper.
- Always type the information and use double spaced lines.
- Briefly describe the event in one or two paragraphs.
- Include a quotation from, for example, The Battalion President

Give a name and telephone number for more information. A specimen Press Release appears at the end of this section. When issuing Press Releases do not neglect the large number of Free Newspapers which are around today. There are probably more newspapers around your area than you thought. You can find out how many from the local Classified Directory.

In areas which are now wired up for Cable Television there is often a channel devoted to local news. Find out where it is because you can probably publicise Battalion events this way.

Very occasionally you may find the Press want to contact you. Remember, that the reporter may not know the BB and therefore you have to be very explicit in what you say. Whilst you should not assume they want to write something critical of the Brigade you should not be too trusting. Below are some simple guidelines for those dealing with Press enquiries.

Guidelines for dealing with Press Enquiries

1. Ask who they are and what publications they are working for.
2. If freelance, where do they hope to publish?
3. What information do they want?
4. What is the context? Are they seeking general background information or for a specific programme or article?
5. What information do they have already?
6. Who have they already been in touch with or spoken to?
7. Are they looking for a quotation? If so, what context will it be in?
8. Has the Brigade a policy on the subject?
9. If it is a TV or Radio programme...
 - a. When will it be recorded?
 - b. When will it be broadcast?
 - c. Who else will be taking part? Remember, you do not have to *respond to an enquiry*. *It might be appropriate to say you have no comment to make.*

If the subject is contentious or likely to attract wider media interest always inform Headquarters. Do not hesitate to ring Headquarters for help and advice if required.

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What if inaccurate reporting in the local paper reflects badly on the Brigade?

From time to time the local press may print something about the BB, which is inaccurate. It may be in the form of a news report or a letter from a member of the public.

The immediate response from many BB Officers is to demand that the newspaper prints a correction and some may send a stinging letter of protest. Unfortunately this tends to give emphasis to the original report which may well have been hardly noticed.

Very careful thought should be given before responding to an adverse report because in most cases the less said the sooner forgotten.

If a response is to be made it is usually better to get a parent or church official to write a letter simply stating how much the BB is valued for its work with boys. Do not attempt to suggest that membership of the BB is the cure for teenage hooliganism, drug taking, truancy etc. It may well be but such claims provide a challenge for someone disenchanted with the Brigade to say that their son left the BB because he was bullied or to complain about the language of a local BB football team.

It is always annoying and frustrating to see the BB unfairly portrayed but often the best thing to do is to grin and bear it.

Child Abuse and the Press

A specimen SUGGESTED PRESS STATEMENT in a case of child abuse

'The Boys' Brigade is a Christian youth organisation committed to providing a safe environment in which boys and young men can develop socially and emotionally towards mature adulthood with a sense of values which benefit the communities in which they live.

The leaders are chosen by the Church to which the Company belongs for their ability to relate to young people and provide worthwhile role models.

The Brigade has a written policy on safeguarding young people and a Code of Practice for Leaders. The policy places great importance on the careful selection of leaders and the requirement that they receive appropriate training. There are over 20,000 leaders in the UK and it is inevitable that even with the most rigorous selection procedures there will be occasions when an inappropriate person is accepted. The Brigade will, of course remind those responsible for selecting leaders of the need to exercise the greatest care and to provide proper supervision.

We regret the damage to the victims of.... (insert name as appropriate).... behaviour, their parents and the other voluntary leaders in the Company. Such incidents are, thankfully, rare in The Boys' Brigade but are never taken lightly, They must not, however, be allowed to eclipse the otherwise excellent work done by voluntary leaders and churches who provide purposeful activities among young people and promote high standards of behaviour.

Specimen General Press Statement

On Sunday 4th October over 200 boys and young men aged from six to eighteen who are members of The Boys' Brigade paraded to Holy Trinity Church, Blanktown for the annual Battalion Church Parade. Holy Trinity is the home of 3rd Anytown Company who were joined by members of the 1st (Wesley Methodist), 2nd (Blanktown URC), 4th (St James) and 5th (West End Methodist) Companies for a celebration service attended by His Worship the Mayor, Counsellor William Smith and a large congregation of parents and friends.

The service was conducted by members of the Battalion. Readings were given by Cpl Richard Brown of 2nd Blanktown Company and Sgt David Jones of 2nd Blanktown Company. Music was provided by Trevor James, Damien Kemp, Philip Forrester, and Paul Weston from 4th Blanktown Company who regularly lead worship in their own church.

After the service there was a march past and the Mayor and the Battalion President Mr Arthur Morton took the salute. The Mayor said 'this was a splendid occasion and it is good to know that so many young people belong to such a worthwhile organisation. We are grateful to the many voluntary leaders who give their time voluntarily to provide leadership for these young people.'

ENDS

Further enquiries and information from Peter Strange, Battalion Secretary. Telephone 01234567 (daytime) 01236789 (evenings)

Photograph available.