Shared Leadership and the Media

This publication from the Parents Anonymous® Inc. Shared Leadership Series will assist the reader in developing effective skills for working with the media, including reaching out to create media opportunities, evaluating and utilizing media opportunities that are available, identifying and partnering with parent leaders, and developing a shared leadership approach to all media activities. The companion publication in this series, Media Guide for Parent Leaders, is an excellent tool for parents who are considering working with the media.

When parent leaders speak publicly about their life experiences, they make significant contributions to shaping local, state and national agendas for children and families. In the early 1970s, Parents Anonymous® parents were the first in the country to speak out from the perspective of parents working to overcome difficulties in their lives. In 1973, when Jolly K., the founding parent of Parents Anonymous® Inc., appeared before the U.S. Senate Subcommittee on Children and Youth to share her personal experiences, the extensive media coverage generated by her powerful testimony reached every corner of the nation. Jolly’s moving story helped ensure passage of the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA) in 1974 and put a human face to a complex social issue. CAPTA was the first federal law that focused on prevention as a critical solution to child abuse and neglect. It established a federal leadership role in promoting community-based prevention efforts such as Parents Anonymous® and this legislation continues today through funding reauthorizations.

Working with the media is a valuable opportunity for parents who have benefited from a specific program or activity to “give back” to others. Because of the courage and tenacity of parent leaders who speak out through the media, thousands of professionals, staff, policymakers and other community members throughout the country have gained significant insights into the broad range of issues affecting families. Their personal stories of strength and success not only offer hope and inspiration to others, but also provide guidance and expertise to help shape policies and practices affecting families.

The expertise of parent leaders, combined with that of professionals, is a dynamic example of shared leadership. National and local media often seek expert information from both parents and professionals. The power of parents speaking from their own experience is unequaled as a mechanism for demonstrating the success that can be achieved by other parents. Real-life examples from parents who have successfully resolved their own personal issues and concerns provide an essential resource for the media. It is important for professionals to consistently promote the voice of parents through print and electronic media.