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Top 5 Tips for Media Covering Sandusky Trial

From Leading National Foundation Working to End Child Sexual Abuse

NEW YORK, June 7, 2012 /PRNewswire-USNewswire/ -- The following is being released by the Ms. Foundation for Women:

1. Include credible child sexual abuse experts in your coverage.

Although the child sexual abuse prevention movement is nascent, there are a number of local and national organizations using different approaches to prevent child abuse and work with survivors. The Ms. Foundation for Women, one of only two national foundations funding in this area, is engendering the movement through its support of a broad network of child sexual abuse prevention advocates. Please contact the Ms. Foundation to schedule an interview with child sexual abuse prevention expert Monique Hoeflinger or to be connected to survivors and experts in the field.

2. Focus on solutions.

A January 2012 report released by the Ms. Foundation for Women and the Berkeley Media Studies Group found that early media coverage of the abuse at Penn State fell short in examining what preliminary measures should have been taken to prevent the abuse from occurring. According to the report, "Breaking News on Child Sexual Abuse: Early Coverage of Penn State," less than one-third of the general news coverage included a mention of a potential solution or policy measure to reduce or prevent future abuse.

Some examples of solutions include:

- Creating a family safety plan, like the one developed by Stop It Now! (http://www.stopitnow.org/family_safety_plan)
- Working to implement prevention policies and practices in community organizations, for example, through Samaritan Counseling Center's "Safe Church (<http://www.scclanc.org/calltoaction.htm>)" program.
- Advocating for policies and legislation that mandate prevention practices in youth-serving organizations.

3. Highlight a preventive, rather than criminal justice, approach.

The Ms. Foundation report found that, among articles mentioning solutions, the most frequently cited ones focused on actions after the abuse had been committed, such as reporting abuse, rather than measures intended to prevent abuse from occurring.

The criminal justice response does not prevent child sexual abuse. It merely punishes one, isolated abuser. A conviction for Sandusky or other perpetrators would do little to help the children who continue to be abused in communities across the country or the vast majority of survivors who don't report their abuse. Use examples of community-based approaches that require adults to pro-actively prevent – rather than prosecute – the abuse before it begins.

4. Place child sexual abuse in its appropriate context.

Media coverage often focuses on an isolated perpetrator, rather than painting a full picture of the prevalence of child sexual abuse in this country. More than 300,000 children are sexually abused each year in the U.S. – about one in four girls and one in six boys.The perpetrator is most often someone the child knows and trusts, as was the case with Sandusky's alleged victims. Propagating the myth of "stranger danger" gives parents a false sense of safety in the places where their children live, learn and play.

5. Use precise language.

Imprecise language limits the public's understanding of child sexual abuse and disguises its severity. Avoid ambiguous phrases, such as "inappropriate sexual behavior," or terms that minimize the alleged actions, such as "horseplay."

Download "Breaking News on Child Sexual Abuse: Early Coverage of Penn State" at ms.foundation.org/resources/publications (<http://ms.foundation.org/resources/publications>).

About the Ms. Foundation for Women

The Ms. Foundation for Women is the leading national social justice foundation committed to building women's power to ignite change. Every day, it helps over 150 grassroots organizations across the US fight for changes like good paying jobs, reproductive health, ending violence against women and girls, and the inclusion of women at decision-making tables. By investing in social justice trailblazers—especially women from low-income communities and communities of color most affected by injustice—it works for a nation in which power and possibility are not limited by gender, race, class, or any other factor. The Ms. Foundation delivers funding, builds skills, develops leaders, connects activists with allies, and amplifies the voices of our grantees to create change that benefits women, families and communities. ms.foundation.org (<http://ms.foundation.org/>)

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