

**2020 Online Communications Network Meeting
16th of December 2020
9.30 am- 5.30 pm (Brussels Time)**

On the 16th of December, Eurodiaconia held its 4th Communications Network meeting online. Over the last years, an increasing number of NGOs in Europe, including some Eurodiaconia members, have been targeted by extremist groups, local authorities, and politicians due to their commitment to safeguarding vulnerable groups. The communications of the diaconal values, along with the specific skills to respond adequately in case of a crisis appears fundamental.

The 2020 meeting was held in the form of an online workshop aimed at giving participants specific tools to deal with moments of heightened social and mainstream media pressure following a crisis and strengthening the Christian identity within their diaconal organisations. Five communication officers from Eurodiaconia member organisations, from Finland, the UK, Czech Republic, and Spain came together for one-day training to exchange and learn more about communications crisis techniques.

The training was delivered by Media First and current working journalists, along with the Eurodiaconia *Senior Communications Officer*, PR and communications professionals – all of whom were expert and experienced trainers.

Meeting Notes

In an open initial discussion, the group spoke about the types of crises that could impact their organisations and the trainers also offered guidance about responding swiftly, options for using statements as opposed to in-person interviews, and the importance of consistency across organisations.

In groups, trainers conducted a positive interview for a print outlet before moving towards crisis management with radio and television-style interviews in challenging situations. All spoke about how much participants would gain from the session, thanking the *Senior Communications and Membership Officer* for bringing everyone together.

Participant Name	Mr. Antonio La Mantia <i>Senior Communications and Membership Officer, Eurodiaconia (EU)</i>
General Feedback	Antonio came with some experience of being interviewed by journalists as well as some media training. He had also been involved in previous crisis management. He was keen to learn how to speak with confidence and manage emotions. He wanted to give the media what they wanted but trainers hope he learned skills to help him better control his message and not just feel a hostage to the interviewer. As we progressed through the interviews, he became clearer in his message and that should give him confidence in controlling the agenda. Antonio chose to change his subjects at the last minute, which was a good lesson for him as he realised the need to be prepared and practise as much as possible.
Print	<p>Interview topic: Refugee Day Centre Concerns</p> <p>Target media outlet: Local Newspaper</p> <p>Antonio gave a clear and detailed explanation of the centre and what it offers the users. It was good to hear of the positive work going on – vocational training, language skills. He spoke of the 95 percent employment success rate but this was right at the end of the interview. Bring this earlier to support the work of the centre. Remember AMEN. I think we need to focus on the readers of this newspaper and address their concerns earlier. I would talk about users being supported rather than “monitored” — it suggests they are being spied on. Trainers liked the message of empowerment and the boost to the local economy. A positive message on which to end.</p>
Radio	<p>Interview topic: Arson Attack by Day Centre Users</p> <p>Target media outlet: Local Radio</p> <p>Antonio was composed and had a good pace. He was clear that the centre shouldn’t close but showed acknowledgment by stating “we understand concerns”. Trainers also liked the fact that he spoke of the ongoing work with agencies. Trainers would avoid talking about people “feeling in danger” as it buys into the negative language. The grooming curveball was reasonably well</p>

	<p>managed but trainers think they want evidence of what is being done to supervise activities to ensure grooming groups are taking place. Good that Antonio spoke of the 25 years of support. This demonstrates an established community legacy.</p>
TV	<p>Interview topic: Arson Attack by Day Centre Users</p> <p>Target media outlet: Local TV</p> <p>Antonio had good eye contact, which is important as we want to look at the community in the eye. He was more proactive in mentioning the work with local police and communities. However, we cannot say “it won’t happen again”, as there is no guarantee. Better to talk about the on-going, collaborative work. We felt a little more reassured about looking out for grooming and he spoke of social workers monitoring and mentoring — so let’s get this in earlier. He ended with the strong, positive message of the contribution the members made so a nice example would be great to help illustrate the work.</p>
Tips	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preparation • Have a strong example to support your key message.

Delegate Name	<p>Elena Casafont Vidal</p> <p><i>Communications Officer, Nueva Vida (ES)</i></p>
General Feedback	<p>While Elena has worked in communications across different areas, this was a new challenge for her because she was pushed into interview situations, to help build her experience and awareness of how to manage conversations with journalists. At the outset, she mentioned that journalists often lack an understanding of the work that organisations such as Nueva Vida are involved with. Those journalists may also be inaccurate or lack precision. As part of this training, trainers were encouraging all the delegates to make sure the media were on the receiving end of easy, simple messages supported by human examples or stories. Elena (and her colleagues) should make it as easy as possible for any writer or interviewer to understand who she is representing</p>

	<p>and what they're striving to achieve. Journalists will make mistakes, so don't assume they know who you are. Within our conversations trainers were also encouraging Elena to plan, having clarity around her main point or message and developing stories or examples which support her work or agenda.</p>
<p>Print</p>	<p>Interview topic: From Homelessness to The Hostel, Then to Work and A New Life</p> <p>Target media outlet: National Newspaper – Spain</p> <p>Elena is a talented linguist and here she was building her communications skills. While the temptation is to treat any interview as a question-and-answer session, more accomplished interviewees will realise that the key is to use the questions as a platform to try and push whatever agenda or message, she wants to highlight. Firstly, Elena needed a clear message. This may vary from day to day or it may depend on the issue or even the publication. Here, the subject was the new programme for the homeless. Elena then needed to consider what she would want any reader to take away from this interview. Was she looking for donations, community support, political support, or more sympathy towards those being affected? In any event, she needed to illustrate that assisting people works. Only by asking and pushing Elena, we heard the story of the 30-year-old woman who'd turned around her life. This was a lovely, warm human case study, so Elena could have used it earlier to highlight the positive benefits of assisting those who are struggling. So trainers wanted Elena to be more proactive and descriptive — as she will be in her language.</p>
<p>Radio</p>	<p>Interview topic: Refugees Seek Opportunities to Improve Their Lives</p> <p>Target media outlet: Radio news (English speaking) for Spain</p> <p>This was a good effort from Elena, managing a broadcast interview in a foreign language. Trainers reminded her that she doesn't need to just answer the questions. When trainers asked which nations that the refugees were arriving from, her response included countries bordering Turkey and Greece, as well as Albania and Iran. Then, by stopping, Elena invited a more negative question. After naming several nations, she could have then set out why it was right that the people of Cantabria (or anywhere else) support these people and help them</p>

	<p>turn around their lives. She needed a positive illustration. Elena referred to the media view of refugees, whereas trainers felt she would be better served by ignoring that media, and pointing to the satisfaction and value of helping to even when referencing those arriving by plane, car, or boat, she needed more illustrations about these individuals, to offer the listener an insight into their lives. Afterwards, Elena appreciated that it didn't serve her purpose to introduce a negative example, namely the stowaway on the ship. Elena pointed out that there were many positive stories — so she needed to tell them.</p>
<p>TV</p>	<p>Interview topic: We've Always Moved Across Borders, Says Group Supporting Refugees</p> <p>Target media outlet: Television news (English speaking) for Spain</p> <p>For any television-style interview across these remote platforms, trainers reminded Elena to maintain strong eye contact with her camera, rather than letting her focus wander around. Elena's kindness and her passion to assist those less fortunate than herself really came through in this conversation. However, she was easily drawn into a debate, rather than focusing on her messaging. Preparation for an interview is all-important, with the spokesperson organising the message they want to land, and the stories they'll use to achieve that. Trainers felt Elena wanted to have the wider debate with them, and within the limited time constraints of a broadcast interview, this won't necessarily work for her. She would have more impact with a focussed message for the audience, allied to supporting stories or examples.</p>
<p>Tips</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Don't introduce negative angles yourself. If they arise then deal with them and steer towards the positive examples which reflect so well on the people you're trying to assist. • Build up stories or human illustrations, even they are anonymous, which show how people are turning around and improving their lives.

Delegate Name	Elizabeth Hay <i>Communications Officer, CrossReach (UK)</i>
General Feedback	Elizabeth came with quite a lot of experience of being interviewed by journalists and had had media training some time ago. She had also had plenty of experience in dealing with crisis communications. She was particularly keen to learn from the crisis element and have a more structured methodology in anticipation of a crisis. Elizabeth, unfortunately, had a lot of broadband problems in the session but it didn't hold her back from some very effective learning and interviews. She said she found it really useful for her confidence but also in helping support people in preparation for an interview.
Print	<p>Interview topic: New Mental Health Drop-in Centre</p> <p>Target media outlet: Local Newspaper</p> <p>This was an informative interview. Elizabeth gave a clear overview of both the need and the service that would be provided. She spoke of 1 in 4 people in the community suffering, so this will appeal to many of the readers. Her case study of Sarah was really good and demonstrated good use of AMEN. She handled the “short term” funding curveball well and reflected on the 150-year commitment that “grew from a small seed”. Nice, visual, and clear language. Let's avoid the jargon — think of the audience rather than stakeholders. The Kilmarnock example of early interventions was good. As soon as trouble questions appear, bring this in to demonstrate your pro-active work.</p>
Radio	<p>Interview topic: Home Closure — 20/30 Bed Care Home for Elderly Residents to Close</p> <p>Target media outlet: BBC Radio Scotland</p> <p>What trainers liked was Elizabeth's tone. It was warm and gentle. Very important in such a sensitive issue. She spoke of it being “difficult and devastating”. Trainers liked her talking about the impact on the staff too as they were “very close to residents”. This shows empathy and the wider community impact. She found the funding question trickier, so she may need a little more</p>

	<p>planning and practice behind this. The example of Eve was nice but participants can't keep the focus on that as this is one lucky resident — what about the others?</p>
TV	<p>Interview topic: Home Closure — 20/30 Bed Care Home for Elderly Residents to Close</p> <p>Target media outlet: STV News</p> <p>There's no need to thank the interviewer. Focus on the audience. Elizabeth used some very proactive language stating how they were working hard to find the "safest and most secure" accommodation for every resident. Do we have an example? Trainers liked the information on the relocation process. There was a nice bridge around the funding question and trainers liked the candid reflection that "we thought we'd be here for the next 70 years". It is important not to forget those emotional relations with the residents. This shows you care. Overall, a clear, empathetic, and informative interview, reflected in her strong and audience-focused sound bite.</p>
Tips	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Avoid jargon. • Bring those personal anecdotes in nice and early.

Delegate Name	<p>Laura Niemi</p> <p><i>Communications Officer, Diakonissalaitos (FI)</i></p>
General Feedback	<p>Although Laura is a communications director and has organised lots of media interviews and supported media crisis responses, she has never been interviewed herself. This was an opportunity for her to experience it for herself and she was keen to learn from the training to help her in managing a crisis and supporting her spokespeople. Laura felt she struggled a little as English is not her first language. Plenty of preparation time will help her plan and practice her messages. Trainers would encourage her to focus on the wider audience to give her interviews more empathy.</p>

<p>Print</p>	<p>Interview topic: Housing First Initiative</p> <p>Target media outlet: Local Newspaper</p> <p>Laura gave a nice overview of the project which detailed who would benefit and stated that “everyone has the right to human dignity”. Trainers really liked her example of Bob (a user) and how his life had been transformed and he was now supporting people himself. Great use of AMEN. Laura spoke of there being “meaningful” support in the community. As with Bob, we need evidence of this to convince the audience. Laura did well to allay the fears of the residents by stating how staff are there full time and had long experience in the neighbourhood. Again, a nice example would support this.</p>
<p>Radio</p>	<p>Interview topic: Anti-Social Behaviour at Residency</p> <p>Target media outlet: Local Radio</p> <p>Laura was calm and composed but as she said herself, she did appear a little detached. We just need a little more warmth in the response. She apologised for the situation and spoke of working hard to rebuild trust. What is being done? We need evidence of that action. She spoke of working with local groups and holding meetings with residents. So what positive outcome have we had from this? Trainers suggested avoiding talking about people being “afraid”. Let’s talk about their concerns — and how these are being addressed.</p>
<p>TV</p>	<p>Interview topic: Anti-Social Behaviour at Residency</p> <p>Target media outlet: Local TV</p> <p>Laura had a warm smile as she began. This is much better as it will establish a positive first impression with the audience. She showed good CARE at the start and gave evidence of the ongoing work with groups across the community. A much stronger start to the interview. She responded to the eviction question well as she made it clear that “these were their homes with their contracts”. It was suggested to use this as an opportunity to bridge back to the key message of ongoing cooperation with community groups. This will</p>

	reassure people much more and they may be more willing to consider volunteering or be more understanding of their new neighbours.
Tips	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on the community, rather than the journalist. • Bring in those case studies and anecdotes to support your message.

Delegate Name	<p>Pavel Hanych</p> <p><i>Communications Officer, Diakonia ECCB (CZ)</i></p>
General Feedback	<p>Pavel has previously conducted media interviews. However, this was a valuable session as trainers provided numerous tips and techniques which he may be able to use in any future interviews. Trainers emphasised the importance of having a clear message with strong supporting examples which an interviewee should be driving into conversations with journalists. From previous experiences, Pavel was inclined to answer the questions being put to him. So this demanded a shift in focus as trainers encouraged him to be more proactive in any dealings with the media by using the questions as a launchpad for his agenda.</p>
Print	<p>Interview topic: Shoebox Gifts Spreading Joy and Solidarity This Christmas</p> <p>Target media outlet: National newspaper</p> <p>This was an uplifting, positive story with Christmas gifts collected and distributed to children living in poverty or with families struggling to enjoy the festive season. “It’s a great thing to do for those living in poverty but also for the better off to show solidarity for others,” were Pavel’s words, as he spoke with passion about the value of “shoebox” collections. The key learning point for Pavel from this exchange was the need for him to offer illustrations or examples. Rather than just saying it would bring joy and happiness, this would have been stronger if he offered a story, perhaps from last Christmas, about children showing their excitement at receiving gifts. Pavel was inclined to answer the questions being asked, rather than thinking about how he would make this a warm, visual story that would provoke a Christmas smile.</p>

<p>Radio</p>	<p>Interview topic: Real Meaning of Christmas Can Still Shine Through Amid COVID</p> <p>Target media outlet: English speaking radio news in the Czech Republic</p> <p>Pavel has conducted numerous radio interviews in his native language, where he would be fluent and comfortable in expressing his views. It was understandable that here we had some hesitancy as he managed this conversation in English. Trainers did note and discuss with Pavel that he shouldn't try to answer every question. He should be using the questions to push towards his agenda and main message. While he came across as a sincere, caring spokesperson, I felt he needed more clarity as to the point he wanted any listener to take away. This was informative rather than being focused and driving towards the main message. Overall, he deserved credit for mastering a radio interview in English.</p>
<p>TV</p>	<p>Interview topic: Helping Relatives to See Their Loved Ones at Christmas</p> <p>Target media outlet: English speaking television news in the Czech Republic</p> <p>This was a stronger performance because it was clear from his first response that Pavel was attempting to push forward his messaging, around the opening of care homes to allow relatives to visit at Christmas. Trainers reminded Pavel that this set the direction of the conversation. So he should appreciate the value of pushing forward his main points, rather than just answering questions. While this was better, Pavel could have added even more impact to his interview, by using some human illustrations, using stories about those who were looking forward to seeing a grandparent or an elderly mother or father. He should remember the value of human stories. But this was a brighter, more proactive performance.</p>
<p>Tips</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Don't just answer the questions being asked. But be proactive and determined to drive the points and stories which matter to you, into any media interview. • Remember the value of human stories or illustrations. If speaking about care homes or the elderly, tell their stories — even if you have to ensure they remain anonymous.