



On the Record for Children

Introduction

In 2001, AP was asked to cover the run-up to the Special Session of the General Assembly on Children for the NGO Committee on UNICEF, an international coalition of NGOs that work on children and partner with UNICEF. AP produced three newsletters, each one more ambitious than the previous one. The project culminated at the UN Special Session itself, where AP produced content for a daily tabloid newspaper, a new website, and an online newsletter.

The immediate goal was to help the Committee members to lobby for a strong declaration on the rights of children. While the text was inevitably a result of compromise, the declaration was welcomed by advocates and the protection of children has remained at the front of the international agenda ever since. The project also produced some indirect results, including the training of young journalists. But AP was not able to help the committee sustain and use the information tools that was produced by the project.

Telling the Story and Taking Action - On the Record for Children

Working under the direction of Mary Diaz, AP covered three sessions of the UN conference - two preliminary sessions and the actual conference - with 24 editions of a new online newsletter called *On the Record for Children*. These are reproduced on these pages. In what was an innovation at the time, this content was disseminated in three ways: by email to 5,000 subscribers (mainly NGO Committee members) around the world; posted in pdf form on a new Committee website; and published as a newspaper at meetings.

On the Record for Children became required reading at the conference, and the best source of independent information at the conference and AP's editorial team obtained several "scoops" as the final discussions went behind closed doors. But it was also a tool for advocacy and AP's NGO sponsors agreed that it helped to advance their agenda. (See below)

Faced by the demands of covering a large conference and a limited budget, the AP team was not able to help the NGO Committee create the capacity to take over the newsletter and website, and both products lapsed after the Special Session ended. The Committee was unable to define goals for its own network beyond the conference.

In spite of this, the project produced one unexpected outcome by training young journalists. Aware that young writers would be attending the conference, the AP team hired three young

writers, aged 13 to 16, and offered daily training sessions in journalism for young participants at the conference. A total of 24 trainees took part, and all were invited to contribute articles to *On the Record for Children*. By the end of the conference, half of the writers on the paper were under 20. Their age was not made known to readers and few could tell the difference between the “professionals” and the youngsters.

This nurturing of young writing talent turned out to be one of the most positive outcomes of this project, even though it was never one of the original goals. Yelena Ovcharenko, a 15 year old writer wrote: "We the children of the UN newspaper would like to thank AP's patient and hardworking staff for putting up with our amateur writing and our attitudes. We would like to thank you for giving us the best days of our lives. CPACIBO -- (thank you in Russian) -- for being willing to work with us because together we have made a difference." This was echoed by the co-chair of the UNICEF Committee.

Producing Change

As with AP's work for Youth Against AIDS, AP's partnership with the UNICEF Committee produced highly effective tools and short-term outcomes, but failed to empower the actual partner. In spite of this, these projects contributed to major long-term change. The international regime for protecting children has strengthened since 2002, building on the framework created at the Special Session.

Feedback:

“I realized more than ever what a great contribution the newspaper was to the whole process. With the formal negotiations behind closed doors, the newspaper became even more important for NGOs. You targeted the issues well and kept NGOs better informed than we thought possible when the week began. Everyone looked forward to the next issue.” Mary Purcell, Co-chair of the NGO Committee.