

Childhood Detained: A Reporting Project

In places like Dilley, Texas; Divide, Colorado; and Grand Island, Nebraska, children are being locked up every day for no other reason than that their parents were trying to find them a safe place to live. Despite a court order on July 6, 2016 demanding that the federal government release all unauthorized immigrant children from detention, the Obama administration continues to keep these kids under lock and key.

A story like this should be big news. Unfortunately, because the mass media do not give child detention the attention it deserves, the topic has not reached public consciousness.

Independent media have published repeated stories about the issue of child detention. *Democracy Now!*, *The Texas Observer*, *In These Times*, *Rewire* and the *National Catholic Reporter* are just a few of the news media that publish regular stories on child detention. Their stories have not made a bigger impact only because these outlets, on their own, reach a significant but niche audience.

Collaborative Storytelling

[The Media Consortium](#), a national network of 80 news outlets, can offer a method to get these stories the impact they deserve. We participated in a three-year study funded by Voqal and conducted by Harvard Professor Gary King. For this study the Media Consortium organized 35 collaborations involving three or more outlets within a one-year period. The researchers were looking to see if these collaborations would produce a measurable change in public sentiment.

King has not yet published his research, but we can share his results. He found a statistically significant increase in public sentiment as a result of these collaborations. We will use the same methodology to achieve a measurable change in sentiment on the topic of child detention.

Over a period of six to eight months, we will create 8-10 collaborative storytelling projects involving a minimum of 15 outlets. Working closely with allies in the advocacy and policy field to source story ideas, we will focus each collaboration on a different aspect of child detention. Topics will be dictated by editors at our outlets, but may include stories focused on reproductive health, education, economic and racial justice.

The Media Consortium will aggregate and promote the content produced during this project using a distributed content site (like Tumblr or Rebel Runner) and via social media. Through “reverse” press conferences, we will notify policy allies before collaborations are published so that they may, if they choose, develop campaigns around the story content. We have done that before as well, in a 2012 collaboration looking at pesticide use in Kauai. Because we worked closely with allies, that

collaboration resulted in a series of public hearings on Kauai, a trip by a Kauai activist to attend an international conference in Switzerland, and an ongoing effort to change the statutes in Kauai around pesticide use.

Success Metrics

As a result of this grant, the number of stories on child detention, and the number of outlets telling the story of child detention, will increase dramatically.

The Media Consortium will gather data from our distributed content site on social shares; we will also ask our members to share their Google Analytics data on these stories. We will measure success on these metrics based on whether the stories develop a wide reach through social media.

Finally, we have strong indications that with Annie E. Casey Foundation support for this proposal, the Voqal Fund would be willing to provide the support for Professor King's team to use their public sentiment measurement tool to measure the change in sentiment produced by these stories. That would place this project at the forefront of quantitative social science research on the impact of journalism on public discourse.

Please let us know if you would like to see a more developed proposal or require any further information.

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