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Upcoming Appearances:

OCTOBER 29, 2013

ACS President Lori McClung will lead the plenary “Integrating Communications Strategies into your Early Childhood System Building” at the [2013 National BUILD Initiative](#).

Lori McClung’s presentation will provide attendees with tools they can use to successfully integrate communication into a statewide early childhood system-building effort and emphasizing that while it’s not always easy, when done right, smart communication strategies and tactics can be the difference between victory and failure!

The [BUILD Initiative](#) helps states develop an early childhood system—programs, services and policies tailored to the needs of the state’s unique young child population. Conference attendees are various [BUILD States](#) from around the country learning best practices around policy, communication, and outreach for early childhood.

The Fall has and will continue to be a busy time for ACS and our clients with quite a bit of *NEW* news. *New* clients, *new* work with the media, *new* ways of talking about tough issues and *new* opportunities to hear and see presentations by ACS staff throughout the country.

Port of Cleveland Anchors its Spot in Cuyahoga County’s Heart

How many organizations can you name that simultaneously bring billions into the local economy, provide vital financing for infrastructure projects, and protect the natural environment? [The Port of Cleveland](#) provides all of these vital services for Cuyahoga County; but it recognized that doing a great job doesn’t automatically earn the support a worthy organization deserves. So, with guidance from a new CEO and a Strategic Action Plan, The Port staff moved to the next step - to increase its community outreach and education work.

As part of a new Strategic Action Plan, the Port made communication and engagement a priority, specifically setting goals to communicate transparently to stakeholders and the public, engage collaboratively with regional economic development stakeholders, and provide accountability through regular public reporting on performance. To help accomplish those goals, the Port asked ACS to develop a three-year strategic communications and outreach plan.

ACS helped the Port staff create new ways to connect with key audiences from maritime and finance professionals to community partners, and grow its reach beyond the “usual suspects”, including older residents and young professionals. Overall, the plan is [Continued on page 2](#)

Making the Case for a Difficult Issue

No one likes to talk about rape or sexual assault, but it’s a serious problem that needs attention. Fortunately, the Cleveland Rape Crisis Center has provided support and resources for victims of sexual assault in Greater Cleveland for nearly 40 years. ACS has been honored to provide both volunteer support (ACS President Lori McClung is a former member of CRCC Board of Directors) and professional guidance (through an existing consulting partnership) to CRCC for the past decade, helping the organization build the case for support for state and local funding.

ACS planted the seed nearly 10 years ago (through ACS President Lori McClung) for the city and state to fund services for rape survivors,” explains CRCC Executive Director Sondra Miller. “And with the consulting relationship we now have with the ACS team, their work couldn’t have been more timely. Several years ago, as much as half of our funding came from federal sources and the rest from private donations. But over the years, those federal funds have fallen to closer to 25% of funding, and ACS has been helping us build a strong communications strategy to build a case for support.”

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WHAT'S NEW

Helping Michigan's Youngest Residents Get a Great Start

When the State of Michigan and its Early Childhood Investment Corporation wanted to improve their tools and messages about early childhood development and strengthen its own Great Start brand, it called on ACS. During the next few months ACS will partner with [EMC Research, Inc.](#) and [The Neimand Collaborative](#) to create and conduct a series of focus groups for parents of young children across the state to determine their awareness of and responses to the messages currently used by Great Start.

Once the focus groups are concluded, ACS will use what they learn to create two telephone surveys—one for parents and another for early childhood providers—to further test awareness and responsiveness to Great Start's messages and tools, as well as awareness of and receptiveness to the Great Start brand.

This project not only combines the research and messaging expertise of EMC and ACS, but also leverages our considerable experience in the early childhood arena and our similar work in Ohio, Arizona and New York to bring the best results for Great Start. Stay tuned for more once this project concludes!

For more information on Great Start visit www.greatstartforkids.org

ACS Helps Parents Find Quality Child Care and Early Learning Opportunities

Identifying the right childcare or preschool provider can be incredibly stressful for parents. It's a decision that helps to lay the groundwork for a child's future success. In Arizona, ACS client First Things First (FTF) has just launched a new website, <http://qualityfirstaz.com> to help parents identify what quality care looks like and find a quality child care and preschool setting that meets their needs.

The website and materials are built upon messages developed by FTF and ACS during the last several months. It offers families tools to help make informed decisions quality child care and preschool including, information about the importance of placing children in an environment that will prepare them for kindergarten, a checklist of questions to ask any potential childcare or preschool provider and a database of providers who are participating in Quality First.

We're proud to play a role in this important resource for Arizona's children!

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designed to turn the Port's existing and new allies into advocates—and to build a broader and more substantive connection between the Port and county residents.

Once the plan was approved, ACS stepped up to help with implementation, disseminating and training on the Port's new messages and handling daily media relations. Proactive earned media exposure has increased since the plans completion, highlighting the Port's work in protecting and preserving Cleveland's lakefront environment with the unveiling of a [new lakefront overlook and nature preserve](#) and promoting its environmental award from American Association of Port Authorities ([AAPA](#)) for cleaning up the Cuyahoga River. ACS also helped the Port build awareness of its vital role in economic development, through financing [projects like a local school expansion and refinancing of a premier senior housing community](#). In partnership with a local social media firm, ACS is contributing to a new Facebook ad campaign to reach even more potential Port supporters.

As a result of all of the planning, media and social media activity, the Port is building a stronger positive image and more fans across the region. ▲

Making the Case for a Difficult Issue

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One of the first things ACS has done is help CRCC build a strategy to help communicate to educate public officials about how CRCC is funded. "Most of them are shocked to learn that no state or local money supports our work," says Miller. "Each division—from the justice department to police to Department of Child and Family Services—assumed that someone else was already supporting rape survivors."

Earlier this year the Ohio General Assembly appropriated \$2 million for rape crisis centers across the state in June. "We believe we will be eligible for some of that funding," says Miller.

Rape and rape crisis services are very marginalized," she explains. "Most people want to ignore the problem or pretend it doesn't exist, so it's not the most comfortable issue to support. ACS has helped us communicate about our work in a way that people can understand. They've helped us build the case of why investing her makes our community healthier, safer and stronger."

But the work of CRCC is more than just about supporting victims. "Ten years ago, we were almost exclusively focused on providing services to survivors." Miller explains. "Now, thanks to leadership from Lori McClung as a former CRCC Board member and now with ACS Team, we understand how we can make change on a much larger scale by working at the policy level to change the funding structures that support our efforts." ▲

ACS Team Spotlight

EMC = Great Research for ACS Clients

ACS prides itself on targeted, relevant communications—which requires targeted, relevant research. That’s why we’re proud to call [EMC Research, Inc.](#) a partner on our team. EMC, with locations in Ohio, California, and Washington State, is a public opinion and market research firm that helps us understand client audiences better and learn what motivates them to action.

EMC is especially skilled at understanding what we need to know, and from whom, and then designing an approach and methodology that gets to the heart of the matter. In addition, they provide valuable insights and recommendation about what the research data actually means for our communications work and how we might best leverage ACS early childhood expertise on behalf of shared clients.

“We try to provide data and information that helps ACS decide what they will ultimately do or provide for their clients,” says Tom Patras, Vice President of EMC. “We listen to key audiences and provide ACS with knowledge that shapes their direction. Based on the data or messages we’ve tested through target populations, we can provide information on perceptions of issues and reaction to messages—including the kind of information that seems to be persuasive, and where audience members prefer to get that information.”

To date, ACS and EMC have worked in partnership to leverage each of their areas of expertise to create a clear picture of the audience landscape for several of ACS’s early childhood clients, including [First Things First in Arizona](#) and [Early Years Institute](#) in New York. EMC is also part of the team for ACS’s newest early childhood engagement with the State of Michigan.

While we deeply appreciate the talent that EMC brings to our team, we’re even more impressed with their shared personal commitment to helping early childhood organizations. “EMC tries to focus on project and topics that we have a personal interest in. We’ve always done a lot with public education, and as the early childhood field has grown, it was a natural next step for us. For me personally, it’s a much more interesting and compelling topic now that I have two young children of my own.”

“Working with ACS is good,” says Patras. “They bring us interesting projects, and they complement the other work we’ve done in the early childhood arena. They also do a good job of keeping everyone on task. That’s not always easy to do in the public policy realm.” ▲

Be Empowered.

Want to learn how communication, strategy development or advocacy can move your organization forward? ACS is available for training sessions or conference presentations. Contact us for more information. Want more suggestions on improving your communications or strengthening your advocacy work? Contact us at info@advocacyandcommunication.org or call us toll-free at 1-877-372-0166.

Cleveland
1277 West 104th St.
Cleveland, OH 44102

Columbus
74 West Hubbard Avenue
Columbus, OH 43215

Washington, DC
300 New Jersey Avenue, NW
Suite 900, PMB 9005
Washington, DC 20001

Phoenix
207 North Gilbert Road
Suite 007
Phoenix, AZ 85234

advocacyandcommunication.org

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