

Media sex offender stories: missed opportunities to do some good

written by Sandy | February 13, 2019

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Summary of Sex Offender Information

By Sandy Rozek . . . “I’d like to talk to you about a situation involving a sex offender here in Georgia.” It was similar to dozens of calls I receive as communications director of NARSOL, and the soft voice explained what the situation was.

[A man in Cochran, Georgia](#), a man on that state’s sexual offense registry, was being harassed by a neighbor who had signs in front of her property identifying him and his crime, signs with words like “pedophile” and “pervert” in them. The man was breaking no laws, explained the soft-spoken young reporter, and she asked me what I thought about the situation.

I told her about the research showing that the safest communities were created when former offenders were given the opportunity to re-assimilate and show their ability to be law-abiding, productive community members. I briefly referenced

some of the more pertinent facts. I spoke of the lessening of safety when vigilante activities, such as putting up signs, existed.

When the reporter asked if I would do a Skype interview for a piece she was doing on the subject, I demurred – I don't like the sound of my recorded voice; I am told no one does, but still – and referred her to Brenda, NARSOL's executive director. They connected, Brenda was interviewed, and February 12 the story hit the air on 13WMAZ's eleven p.m. news. I am an early riser, and I heard it and read the accompanying text at 6:05 a.m. on February 13, about thirty minutes before I started writing this.

What a disappointment. What a missed opportunity to do an actual community service.

The piece is certainly not the worst I have read, as these pieces go, pieces designed to do nothing of any concrete value but only to agitate and raise the collective community level of fear, apprehension, and even hatred.

Brenda's interview, reduced to a few sound-bite seconds, could and should have been the segue for some real and balanced reporting. If the reporter had done a little research, or asked me for some, and included some of it, she could have educated her readership and viewing community on [some of the facts](#) about persons required to register on a sexual offense registry and shared information about child sexual offending that could actually give parents legitimate information and useful tools with which to protect their children.

She could have referenced studies showing that behaviors and policies that isolate and ostracize former offenders only exacerbate conditions that lead to lessened community safety rather than greater. She could have pointed out the extremely low re-offense rate of persons on the registry living in the community. She could have quoted statistics showing that

approximately 96% of new sexual offenses is committed by persons with no previous conviction for a sexual offense and that virtually all sexual crime against children is committed by persons who are in what is called the "circle of trust" of the family. This translates to the family members, peers, and authority figures of the victims.

Rather than touting the online registry, she could have cited the total lack of evidence showing its value as a public safety tool and maybe even gotten into some of the studies showing the negative consequences and fallout that decrease public safety.

I would like to say, regarding the neighbor who for two years has maintained signs outside her home, I am very sorry for what she suffered as a child. I am very sorry that she has not been able to get the help she needed and has not been able to move past that horrible time in her life.

I would like to point out to her, as the reporter did not, that her belief that those on the registry shouldn't be allowed to live within certain distances of where children live is a preposterous suggestion. Residency restrictions and exclusionary zones – laws that do not have an iota of evidence supporting them as effective – already severely limit locations where registrants can live to the point that they are often cut off from family and support systems and, in many places, are homeless.

I would also like to say, in reference to her statement, "We went from being a very relaxed, quiet, comfortable, happy place to being very on-guard, because having him here took away that sense of safety," that she is blaming the wrong person.

A man who has lived there for two years without creating any problems or breaking any laws is not who took away the community's sense of safety. She herself has done that, and

now this media piece has contributed.

I see on WMAZ's website that it is titled, "What are Georgia's sex offender laws?" chapter 1.

Let us hope that chapter 2 and any others include information based on facts and evidence that can help restore that sense of safety.

Links to studies for all factual information and statistics given [are found here](#).

The reporter and the station managers were not available for questions before the posting of this. Their comments will be welcomed if and when they would like to make them.