PROJECT REPORT
NOVEMBER 2026

Maximising Media Impact for Underrepresented Groups in Community Rail

Project: Stations of Welcome (Accrington Station Adopters)
Lead: Shahiesta Iqbal, Education Officer, Community Rail Lancashire
Themes:

- Strategic Media Engagement
- Diversity & Inclusion
- Community Empowerment



SUMMARY:

The Stations of Welcome group successfully leveraged local, regional, and national media coverage to break barriers, challenge stereotypes, and secure a prestigious BBC Making a Difference Award. Originating as a modest social gathering in 2021 post-COVID-19, the group grew into an active 20-member station adoption team. This paper details the strategy used to secure high-profile coverage across newspapers, magazines, radio, and television, offering a reproducible framework for other community rail partnerships looking to amplify diverse voices.

MEDIA COVERAGE HIGHLIGHTS

Through proactive PR and authentic storytelling, the group achieved an exceptional media footprint:

- **National & Local TV:** Featured on the BBC's religious affairs programme Sunday Morning Live and showcased on the Britain's Favourite Station Feature on YouTube.
- **Live Radio:** BBC Radio Lancashire broadcasted its flagship Breakfast Show live from the Accrington station ticket office, celebrating the group and community partners.
- **Print & Digital Press:** Major regional feature in the high-profile March/Spring edition of Lancashire Life magazine (coinciding with Mother's Day), extensive coverage in the Lancashire Telegraph, and in-depth industry case studies like Community Rail Lancashire's Feature Index.
- **Award Recognition:** Winner of the BBC "Making a Difference" Award for outstanding community contribution. Later nominated and received the King's Award for Voluntary Services.





Northern Press Release = The catalyst that launched the story
Lancashire Telegraph = Local newspaper amplification
Lancashire Life Magazine = Strategic seasonal feature (Mother's Day)
BBC Sunday Morning Live = National TV production interest
BBC Radio & Making a Difference Award = Culmination of campaign success leading to a nomination for the King's Award for Voluntary Services.

Recipients of the King's Award for Voluntary Services

CORE STRATEGIES FOR MEDIA SUCCESS

Utilise Seasonal and Cultural Calendars

A major breakthrough in the campaign was aligning media outreach with significant calendar milestones. Securing the feature in the March/Spring edition of Lancashire Life to coincide with Mother's Day provided a powerful, emotionally resonant angle. By framing the narrative around a multi-generational group of South Asian Muslim women—many of whom are mothers and grandmothers transforming their local environment—the story became highly relevant to lifestyle editors looking for uplifting, community-focused spring features.

Partner with the Train Operating Company (TOC) First

The bedrock of the media campaign was collaboration with the rail industry. Northern, the train operating company, acted as the initial catalyst by drafting and distributing the primary press release. Launching directly from the Northern Railway Media Centre, securing TOC backing early on granted the project institutional legitimacy, ensured industry-wide visibility, and gave professional journalists a well-structured, authoritative starting point for the story.

Capitalise on the "Ripple Effect" Media Pipeline

Media coverage multiplies naturally when built sequentially. By treating each media hit as a stepping stone, the campaign grew incrementally:

- The initial press release distributed by Northern was quickly picked up by the Lancashire Telegraph, putting the group on the local map.
- The visibility in the local newspaper directly prompted Lancashire Life magazine to make contact, resulting in a premium, beautifully photographed regional feature.
- This combined print and digital footprint drew the attention of national broadcast producers at the BBC, leading directly to TV features, live radio takeovers, and award nominations.

KEY TAKEAWAYS FOR COMMUNITY RAIL

For other station adoption groups looking to replicate this media success, the following steps are recommended:

- **Tie Pitches to Public Holidays:** Look ahead at the calendar (e.g., Mother's Day, International Women's Day, Eid, or Volunteers' Week) and pitch your story to magazines 2–3 months in advance to match their print deadlines.
- **Utilise TOC Communications Teams:** Always approach your Train Operating Company first; they have established media databases, distribution networks, and a vested interest in promoting community successes.
- **Keep the Momentum Moving:** Use existing articles to pitch to the next level of media. If a local paper covers you, send that clipping to regional magazines or regional TV newsrooms.





railwatch

Published by RAILFUTURE Campaigning for a bigger, better railway No 191 £3 October 2024

Volunteers boost pride in town station



Remember: Everyone loves a story. If they don't use it at that moment, they might still use it at some point. Don't be disheartened.