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How Great Western Air Ambulance Charity shares its story of lifesaving care



Great Western Air Ambulance Charity (GWAAC), in essence, is a flying emergency department which transports specialist paramedics in critical care and consultant doctors to scenes of the most serious medical emergencies.

The GWAAC Critical Care Team covers Bristol, Bath & North East Somerset, North Somerset, South Gloucestershire, Gloucestershire, as well as parts of Wiltshire – a population of 2.1 million people. One of the busiest air ambulances in the UK, this charity’s team is operational seven days a week, 365 days a year, and on average is called to over six incidents each day.

Tasked with getting the word out about this important work is the GWAAC Communications and Marketing Team, explains Claire Bovey, Head of Marketing and Communications:

‘Our team consists of five people whose purpose is to raise the profile of the charity and its work across all relevant platforms, to increase brand awareness, activate supporter engagement and increase income.’

‘With limited budget we have a huge reliance on being able to generate earned media to reach new audiences. We need more people to know that their local air ambulance is a charity, not part of the NHS, and not funded by government.’

‘Many understand how vital this service is but few truly understand the difference our crew makes to someone in a life-threatening situation. We need to draw attention to our service, educate those who lack understanding, and demonstrate our impact to those who support us.’

The challenges the GWAAC Communications and Marketing Team face

‘It’s often hard to know what information and stories our local audiences want to hear from us, rather than what we *think* they want,’ says Claire.

‘Having a better understanding of what stories our local/regional press like to cover is helping to give us a steer because they know what their readers/viewers like. Vuelio helps with this in several ways: the information about the contacts in the database can let us know what stories

contacts/outlets like to cover; the open and click rates shown in the distributions area gives a good indication of who engages with what types of GWAAC stories; and email alerts and media monitoring make sure we know very quickly which outlets have published our stories.

‘Our biggest challenge when planning campaigns is to understand how we can measure donations that come into the charity as a direct result of media coverage. While this is difficult, we can at least use Vuelio’s media monitoring and analytics to identify periods of heightened press activity and compare that to funds coming in over the following weeks and try to pull out some trends.

‘Another challenge is that it can be hard to get our news to stand out to press/media among all the other news stories they are being sent every day from other charities and elsewhere. What has been working for us, thanks to Vuelio, is identifying those key contacts and targeting them with the news they are most likely to pick up rather than a blanket approach.’

A key campaign for raising awareness: Ann’s story

‘The ability to track keywords in media has meant we can stay alert to any opportunities that relate to our service,’ says Claire.

‘For example, we may notice that there has been content published by other air ambulances or by hospitals about a particular subject that we can add a voice to. We’re also able to see which outlets and reporters write about subjects that are relevant to what we do. And sometimes we are able to spot stories about people who we have helped in an emergency.

‘This happened in April 2024 when Vuelio alerted us to a story in a national newspaper. The article was about a lady who had suffered a cardiac arrest at home, when alone, but whose life was saved because her postman performed CPR before emergency

services arrived. The article didn't include our charity name or anything more obvious like that, but from reading the piece we could work out that it may have been our paramedics who attended the patient and played a part in saving her life.

'After a bit more digging, we confirmed this and were able to get in touch with the reporter, who also helped connect us with the patient. A few days later she had the opportunity to meet the people from the emergency services who had helped save her life. Not only is this important for us and our crew (we often don't hear from patients once we have taken them to hospital, but are always keen to know how they are) but for the patient – who was unconscious through her ordeal – it was an opportunity for her to find out who helped her and what happened on that day. It offers a chance to put some pieces together and have questions answered.

'After getting in contact and meeting with this particular patient, she wanted to show her appreciation however she could – and kindly offered us the opportunity to share her story further.

[Ann's story - Great Western Air Ambulance Charity](#)

'This led to new media coverage, this time including our charity name and key messages. Ann became very involved with GWAAC over the course of 2024 and featured as the main character in our fundraising appeals, including helping us with such things as radio advertisements and news broadcasts.'

How Vuelio helps GWAAC to reach out to the media

'We've been able to find more media contacts in different industries/types of press through the search feature, and then group them by relevancy for ease of sending out press releases,' explains PR and Communications Co-ordinator Claire Harris.

'It's helping us to have a more targeted approach so the right news goes to the right contacts/outlets and their audiences. For example, every January we send out our annual

mission statistics to press. But because GWAAC covers six areas in our region (Bristol, Bath & North East Somerset, North Somerset, South Gloucestershire, Gloucestershire, as well as parts of Wiltshire) we create one general press release for regional press and then six variations tailored to meet the interests of people in those different areas. We'll send a different version to Gloucestershire press with a bigger focus on Gloucestershire-specific mission stats. Vuelio makes this easy by letting us create a group of Gloucestershire press contacts that we can send the news distribution (press release) to. Being able to clone a press release within Vuelio, makes it super-quick to alter it for the next group of contacts, e.g. Bristol press/media contacts.

'We have also created hyper-local press/media contact groups. For example, our group called "Gloucestershire hyper-local" is useful when we want to share some news about an upcoming community fundraising event, such as a cake sale, and we can hone in on the local weekly newsletters.

'We like how we can add our own media contacts to these groups too as and when we come across them, meaning we can keep our contacts up-to-date and relevant.

'Another useful function of Vuelio's distribution tools is being able to see which contacts have opened and clicked on the press release. This is helpful for informing our choices around who to follow up with. Likewise, the media monitoring function allows us to pinpoint further who has/has not published the news so we know who we could follow up with.'

How GWAAC tracks its impact

Claire explains how the team tracks its successes:

'Thanks to Vuelio's media monitoring feature we can track how many mentions we have had in the press/media over the past year and compare this to previous years to give us

a quick overview of the results of our PR efforts year-on-year.

'If we've received more or less coverage, we have the opportunity to delve into the reasons why and can dig deeper if required by looking at different types of press and media too such as local or regional.

In 2024, GWAAC had 1,972 mentions overall in the press and media, reaching a cumulative audience of up to 872,099,068 and a reported advertising equivalent value of £2,662,836.

'This is huge for a charity of our size,' says Claire.

'Compared to 2023, for example, we can see that we have potentially reached a cumulative total of 700,000,000 more people.

'When drilling down, we can attribute much of this success to a four-hour outside radio broadcast we hosted at our airbase for #RestartAHeartDay with BBC Radio Gloucestershire and coverage of former patient [Ann Carter](#).

'From the outside broadcast alone (including interviews and promotion by BBC Radio Gloucestershire in the run up to Restart a Heart Day, a four-hour live broadcast from the airbase, and replays of interviews in the following weeks/months) Vuelio shows that we potentially reached an audience of 2,779,000.

'Individual mentions of Ann Carter and therefore GWAAC totalled 115 in 2024 – that's 115 mentions we would not otherwise have had in local and national press – all of which helps to raise important awareness of our charity in our region and beyond and it might encourage people to donate.'

☆ The role of Vuelio

'We love Vuelio's media monitoring and analytics tools!' says Claire.

'Every week, in our Communications & Marketing Team meetings, we look at a summary from the previous week of how many press releases went out and what news got picked up by the press/media (this includes how many mentions, most popular news stories and any highlights,

including the outlets that shared our news). It's an opportunity to reflect on any wins and learnings.

'We also provide a snapshot of press/media coverage to the wider charity once a month with a bit more detail, including best performing pieces and reach for online, print and broadcast.

'And once a quarter, we use the data provided by Vuelio to feed into a bigger GWAAC Communications and Marketing report for our Board of Trustees. Vuelio helps us demonstrate the outputs and value of our efforts as a team and how what we are doing is helping to raise awareness of GWAAC in our region and ultimately bring in vital funds. Being able to drill down by month, tags, and type of media is particularly useful and seeing the data visually in charts makes it easier to interpret and form comparisons.

'Following a campaign, we will use the analytics function to identify what campaign news was picked up by press and report back to the campaign manager. We will report on the same stats as mentioned above and look at sentiment also as a gauge to how well the campaign was received. This feeds into a bigger campaign analysis piece.'

Every year, GWAAC plays a part in saving hundreds of lives – Vuelio is proud to support such important work.



Former patient, Ann Carter, being interviewed by local news



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Vuelio helps organisations make their story matter by providing monitoring, insight, engagement, and evaluation tools in a single platform.

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