

Pulitzer puts the focus on the forgotten



Nathalie Applewhite, head of the Pulitzer Centre on Crisis Reporting, in Adelaide last month for the Australian International Documentary Conference

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28 MEDIA

THE AUSTRALIAN, MONDAY, MARCH 8, 2010
www.theaustralian.com.au/business/media

Journalists are being helped to expose systemic crises around the world

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THE Pulitzer Centre on Crisis Reporting is often mistaken for an outfit that specialises in conflict and war.

In some respects, the non-profit American organisation does that in trying to raise awareness of global issues in the US through journalism. It can be a battle.

The philanthropic organisation set up by Amy Pulitzer, a member of the US media dynasty, is filling an unfortunately widening gap in the market.

Its managing director, Nathalie Applewhite, says the idea of

funding "under-reported, systemic-level crises that aren't going to get the headlines, aren't going to compete with the top story of the day" is becoming more pressing as journalism becomes leaner and more parochial.

She says the Pulitzer name helps, "saying this is important, we need to know about it, even if we don't want to know".

The Pulitzer centre is not a media outfit, but complements the work of others by supporting them through funding.

Applewhite says judging by the number of emails she receives each day, journalists are increasingly aware of what the centre can do for them in providing support.

In many instances, it would fund stories by freelancers who had a solid idea and a feasible distribution plan for their output, whether it be newspaper, online or video journalism.

Increasingly, the centre is being approached by staff reporters or major media outlets for help.

"Being engaged in this business right now is a scary time, but also fascinating, just to see how collaborations are happening and people are letting go of things that were really holding them back from producing quality work before," Applewhite says.

Previously, exclusivity and demarcation hurt stories. "What's frustrating to us is we want to create awareness, it's not just a product, it's an issue and an issue people need to know about," she says.

She cites Pulitzer-funded stories appearing in both *The Washington Post* and PBS's *NewsHour* or TV show *Frontline* and *Time* magazine: "We've been part of collaborations and seedings that make both outlets stronger."

The centre is focused upon giving journalistic voice to interna-

tional issues that wouldn't necessarily make the mainstream US press, primarily because they are too remote or too costly.

It is currently expanding its reach to stories within the Asian region and it is willing to have its stories run in Australian media, even if the US is the focus.

Journalists swamped the centre with proposals for stories in Afghanistan, which it rejected.

"We had a flood of Haiti proposals, which made me think a lot of people weren't looking at what we were looking for because it's not about the current earthquake," Applewhite says.

"We're looking at crises in health issues, infrastructure, the judicial system, sanitation and things like that that are just too complex for someone flying in and out of places.

"We actually had a report run on *NewsHour* the night before the

quake hit looking at the fragile state of Haiti, called Haiti's Moment of Hope. How ironic, but for Haiti we already had this work being done that was good and strong."

One instructive part of the centre's work is an increasing use of online updates or blogs as reporters delve into a story. "That really serves the journalist's purpose because it feeds interest in what they're going to produce before the story's audience before it comes out," Applewhite says.

The centre's measurement of a story's success is the impact it has on the US public. In some cases, the stories have seen public policy changes although the centre will never know whether that was directly because of its reporting.

Then there's the holy grail, Applewhite laughs. "We haven't got Oprah yet but we're going to make that happen."