

CAROLINA PUBLIC PRESS

INDEPENDENT, IN-DEPTH & INVESTIGATIVE REPORTING FOR NC

Seeking Conviction: Justice elusive for NC sexual assault survivors



How 10 media outlets—working together—changed state law


IN PARTNERSHIP WITH



This is where we're going.

- Carolina Public Press and Staff
- It Began with a Tip
- Data Told the Story
- The Need for Collaboration
- Choosing Partners
- Challenges
- Outcomes
- Lessons Learned





Who we are
and what we do

Carolina Public Press

Carolina Public Press is an independent nonprofit news organization dedicated to nonpartisan investigative and in-depth reporting, built on the facts and delivered in a context that North Carolinians need to know.

Our award-winning, breakthrough journalism dismantles barriers and shines a light on overlooked and under-reported issues facing our state's 10.5 million residents.



Why did CPP start?

Founded in 2011, CPP initially focused on the issues, topics and challenges faced by Western North Carolina.

In February 2018, we expanded coverage to all of North Carolina.

Since its launch, CPP has attracted a growing statewide and national audience and secured financial support from hundreds of individuals and dozens of foundations across the region, state and nation.

Project Manager

Stephanie Carson



Journalism Background

Worked for Bloomberg Financial, CBS News, Public News Service, Carolina Public Press

Project Manager Experience

Special projects producer for CBS and the owner of an Event Company.

Here I am ...

CPP News & Community Partnerships Manager (and Ski Bum)



Managing Editor

Frank Taylor



Journalism Background

26 years of experience as a journalist throughout North Carolina, Georgia and Florida

Award collector

Two-time winner of the N.C. Press Association's Freedom of Information Award, among dozens of other awards

Here I am ...



Managing Editor, CPP

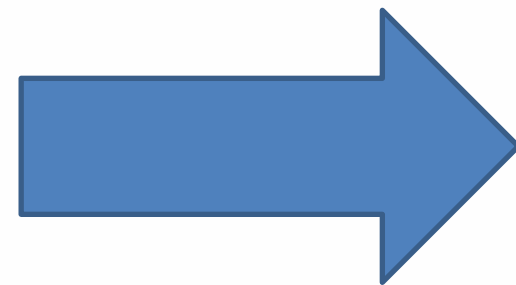
(and resident North Carolina geography expert)

It Began With a Tip...



We got a tip:


"no sexual assault cases were being prosecuted" in a particular county in North Carolina.



We requested NC State Court Data.

Our initial tip wasn't entirely true... but the number of prosecuted sexual assault cases was very low.

But first ... that data ...



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28	96020147060650030101114101CORRECTED									
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31	960201470606500600016000 OFFENSE_NUM 01 DISP_REASON CORRECTED									
32	9602014706113001000010009602014706113IF MCINTYRE, JAMIE, LEE	13774 BOONE TRL	PURLEA				NCC789F451	201409272014092720140927	20150219	AMNNN
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36	9602014706113005DA004000DA20141120MDLLEACH, MATTHEW									
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39	9602014706604001000010009602014706604IF TRIPLETT, VALARIE, STEPHANIE,	1633 ROCK CREEK RD	NORTH WILK				NCC996F479	201410242014102520141024	20141204	AMNNN
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48	9602014706631001000010009602014706631IF HOOD, ASHLEY, LYNN	110 POPE PL NW	LENOI	NC28645	19921208WF		NCC0755F68	201410262014102720141026	20141211	AMNNN
49	960201470663100201001100014527201410264527	VD20141126								
50	96020147066310030101114101CORRECTED									
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53	960201470663100600016000 OFFENSE_NUM 01 DISP_REASON CORRECTED									
54	9602014706835001000010009602014706835IF HINCHER, ELLIOTT, ALLEN	107 CHURCH RO	ARKNORTH	WILKESBORNC28659	19930212WM		NCC0868F53	201411062014111020141106	20150115	AMNNN
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56	96020147068350030100300001BELCHER, J, E		WILKESBORO	NC		C SHP	B426		C96020147068351910	

Enter Kate Martin, Data Super Hero



Kate used her data analysis experience (plus tricks from her nuclear scientist husband) to untangle and compile reams of data.

What she found showed:
we had a story.

The Need for Collaboration

We had a great story.

Why share the wealth?

Geography

The large volume of geographically diverse data would benefit from on-location reporting and local contacts.

Exposure

Collaboration could expand the reach of our reporting across communities and mediums.

Pool Resources

We needed a range of skills and additional resources to contribute to the project.

Data Validation

Kate could benefit from sharing her data analysis to validate it with other experts in data reporting.



This is what we did ...

Choosing Partners

- We identified partners based on:
 - Geography
 - Expertise
 - Audience reach
 - Individual relationships
- We shared a short synopsis of our findings, and discussed basic expectations.
- Our initial goal was just **five** partners.

Then what?



Success

We developed a Memorandum of Understanding that spelled out:

- Quality of work expectations
- The basic premise of investigation
- Trust: no one would "scoop" another
- Legal review process for stories and data
- Workflow for project

We were looking for 5:
10 Partners
signed on



Challenges we faced ...

- Google Docs (sigh)
- Understanding of data among partners
- Missed deadlines
- Pushback from local district attorneys
- Different media platforms have different deadlines (e.g., print releases in the AM; broadcast TV prefers evening primetime).



What did we find?

Statewide, sexual assault cases have a **one-in-four** conviction rate^{*}

^{*} average, state-wide % of convictions after arrest, results varied across counties.

OUTCOME



What did we produce?

Four days of
coordinated
publication.

Analysis: NC convicts fewer than 1 in 4 sexual assault defendants →



Sexual assault suspects face little prospect of conviction in some counties →



Questions of consent can make NC sexual assault cases tough to prosecute →



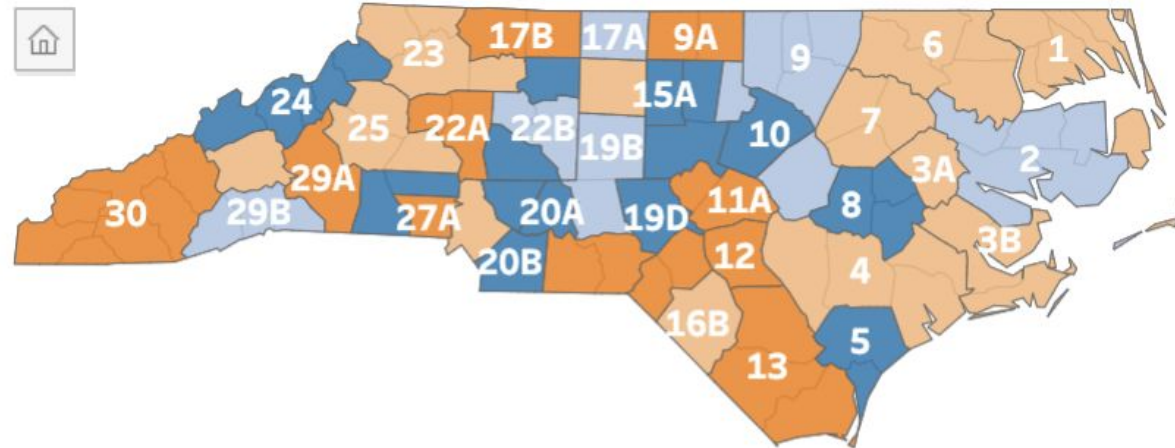
Sexual assault cases hinge on evidence gathered by police, nurses →



How N.C. prosecutorial districts rate

Carolina Public Press obtained court data from the N.C. Administrative Office of the Courts covering cases from Jan. 1, 2014, through June 30, 2018. From that data, CPP analyzed what happens when defendants are charged with a rape crime, looking at what percentage of these cases ended in a conviction, whether through a plea or trial. CPP then evaluated how prosecutorial districts rate when compared to the state's average

■ High ■ Above average ■ Below average ■ Low <>

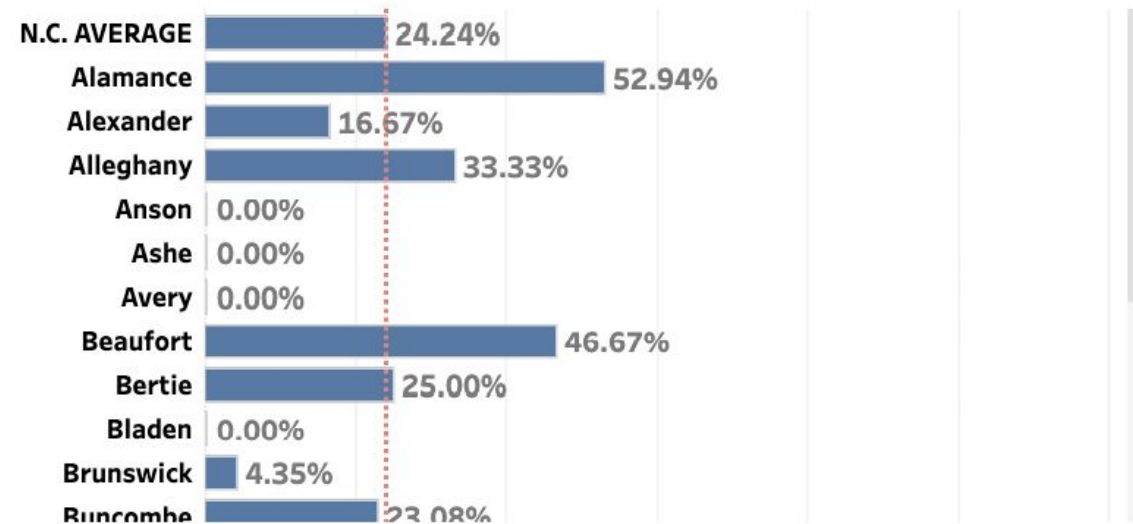


Data-rich graphics

County conviction rates

Carolina Public Press obtained court data from the N.C. Administrative Office of the Courts covering cases from Jan. 1, 2014, through June 30, 2018. From that data, CPP analyzed what happens when defendants are charged with a rape crime, looking at what percentage of these cases ended in a conviction, whether through a plea or trial. CPP analyzed only cases which began and ended during the data's time period.

(Graphic by Cassandra Sherrill/BH Media)



Broadcast content

VIDEO CLIPS AND STORIES

Samantha White: Her story and what she thinks should happen now



Paul Woolverton, The Fayetteville Observer

Monika Johnson Hostler: Has a decade made a difference?



Tyler Dukes and Brad Simmons/WRAL-TV

Monika Johnson Hostler: On how NC compares to other states



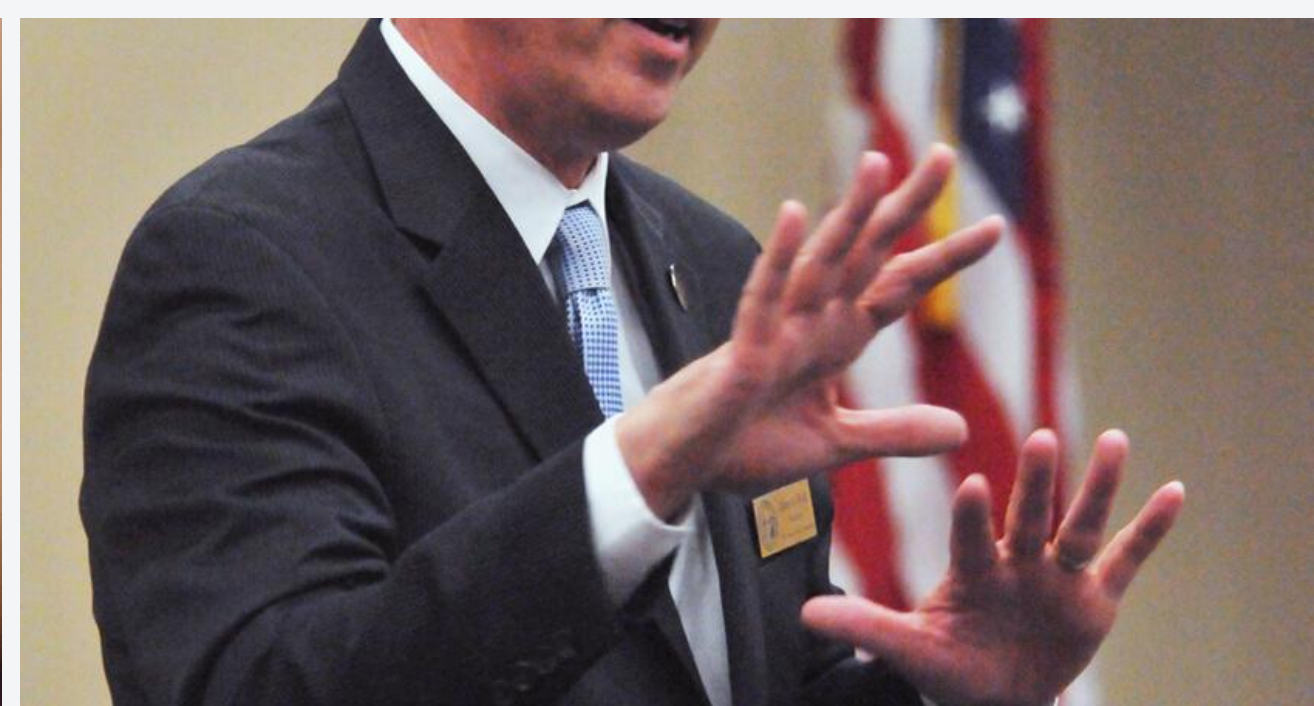
Tyler Dukes and Brad Simmons/WRAL-TV

Attorney General Josh Stein: Measuring success of prosecutions



Tyler Dukes and Jamie Munden/WRAL-TV

Community engagement through listening sessions and forums



What did we accomplish?

Audience reach

Collectively, we reached 1.5 million views across NC

New connections

30 people worked across 11 media outlets



What did we accomplish?

Policy change

Community organizations and law enforcement agencies **began reviewing policies** as a result of our reporting, at times before our eyes in the room.



Highlighted problem

Our data analysis provided insight. Even the State AG didn't have access to all the data. We highlighted vulnerabilities in the system.

Wait, we buried the lede.

SB 199

Signed into Law

Nov. 7, 2019

The law closed the loophole that prevented victims of sexual assault from withdrawing consent.





Lessons Learned

- Make sure partners know how to use Google docs (and have access to the shared account)
- "Lock" the spreadsheets so people cannot modify.
- Specify roles and responsibilities. Know who is doing what. (Don't wait for people to volunteer.)
- Identify a point person (i.e., a cat herder)



Lessons Learned

- Make sure media partners understand the data. Have them explain it to you before they go on interviews.
- Hold any community events involving the reporting two weeks after reporting releases.
- Set deadlines at least two weeks before publication.
- Recognize that some reporters are squeezing in your projects between their regular “day job.”

Thank you to our partners.

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The Herald-Sun



WINSTON-SALEM
JOURNAL



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Questions?

