

## **Seeking Conviction:**

Justice elusive for NC sexual assault survivors



How 10 media outlets—working together—changed state law

#### IN PARTNERSHIP WITH



The Herald-Sun













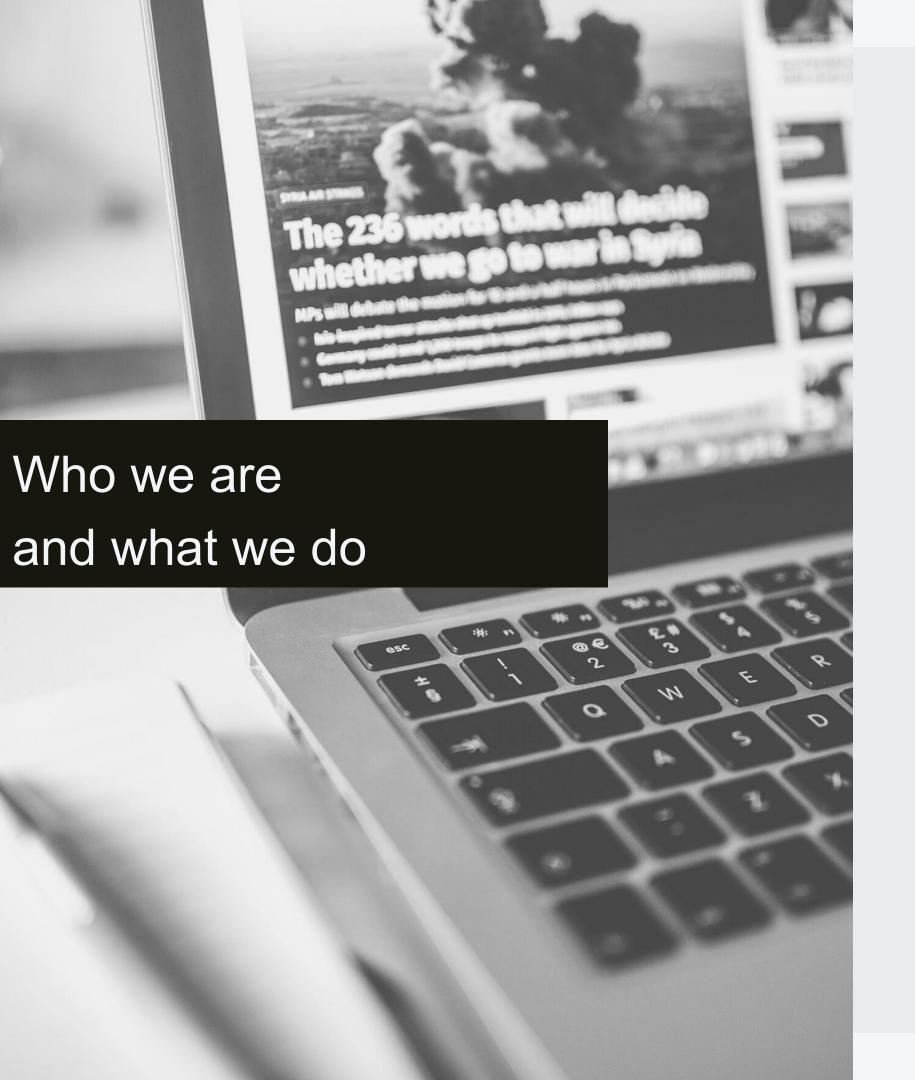




## This is where we're going.

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





## 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

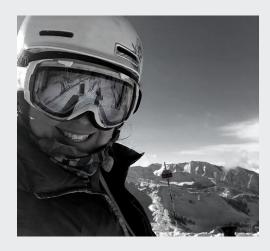
Special projects producer for CBS

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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## 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.



# 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.



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\*

<sup>\*</sup> average, state-wide % of convictions after arrest, results varied across counties.



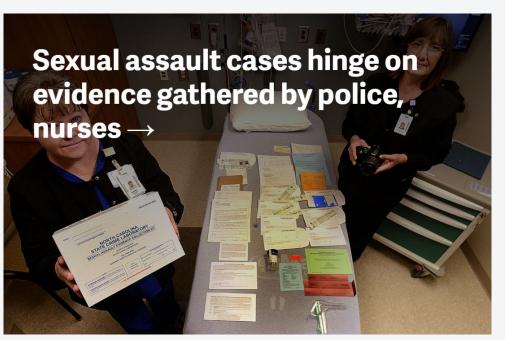
## What did we produce?

Four days of coordinated publication.



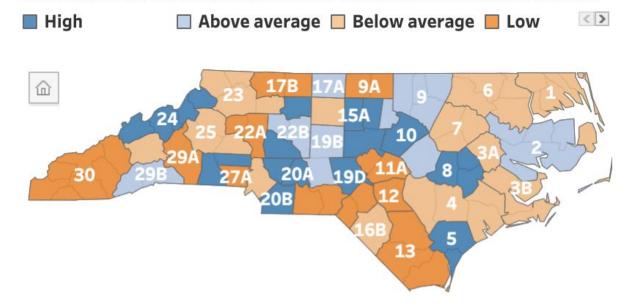






#### How N.C. prosecutorial districts rate

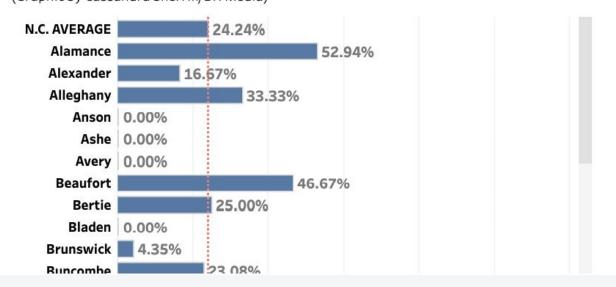
Carolina Public Press obtained court data from the N.C. Administrative Office of the Courts covering cases from Jan. 1, 2014, through June 30, 2018. From that data, CPP analyzed what happens when defendants are charged with a rape crime, looking at what percentage of these cases ended in a conviction,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



#### **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)



# Data-rich graphics

## Broadcast content

#### **VIDEO CLIPS AND STORIES**

### what she thinks should happen now



#### **Attorney General Josh Stein:** Measuring success of prosecutions



Tyler Dukes and Jamie Munden/WRAL-TV

#### Monika Johnson Hostler: On how NC compares to other states



Tyler Dukes and Brad Simmons/WRAL-TV

## Samantha White: Her story and



Paul Woolverton, The Fayetteville Observer

Tyler Dukes and Brad Simmons/WRAL-TV

Monika Johnson Hostler: Has a

Monika Johnson Hostler. Seekin...

decade made a difference?

Community engagement through listening sessions and forums











## What did we accomplish?

## New connections

Audience reach

Collectively, we

reached 1.5 million

views across NC



## 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.

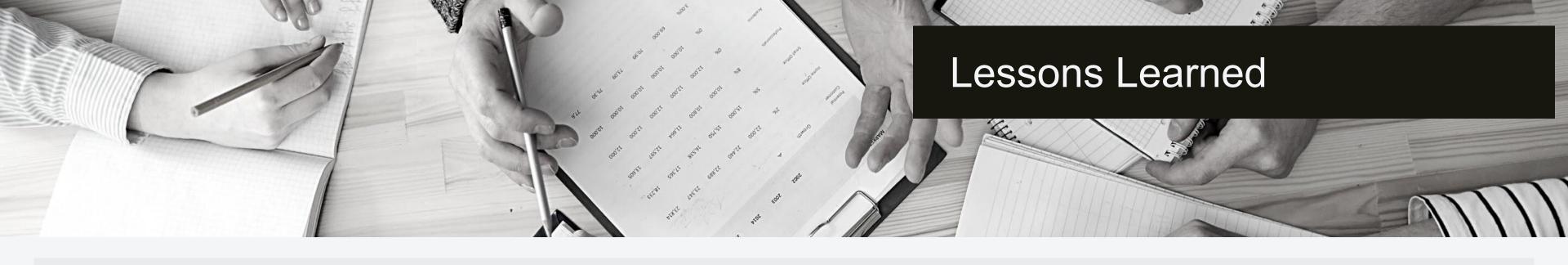
SB 199
Signed into Law
Nov. 7, 2019

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





- 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)



- Make sure media partners <u>understand the data</u>. 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.

#### IN PARTNERSHIP WITH





















# CAROLINA PUBLIC PRESS INDEPENDENT, IN-DEPTH & INVESTIGATIVE REPORTING FOR NC

## Questions?

