

2019-57: Holmes vs Chilliwack Progress

July 16, 2019

The National NewsMedia Council mediated and found that corrective action was taken to address a complaint about the headline for a June 24 2019 news article in the Chilliwack Progress, “Heroism medal for Chilliwack woman who tried to save man in a wheelchair stuck on rail tracks.”

The original headline of the article read “Heroism medal for Chilliwack woman who tried to save wheelchair-bound man stuck on rail tracks.”

Angela Holmes filed a complaint with the National NewsMedia Council about the use of the term “wheelchair-bound.” The complainant stated that the term was inappropriate and derogatory, and that its use “contributes to uninformed widespread misconceptions about people with disabilities and mobility devices.”

The complainant cited various journalistic style guides and community guidelines that guard against the use of terms such as “wheelchair-bound” or “confined to a wheelchair,” and that instead recommend the language, “person who uses a wheelchair.”

The Chilliwack Progress is owned by Black Press Media. Black Press responded by stating that it agreed with the complainant’s assessment that the term “wheelchair-bound” is antiquated and ableist. It therefore removed the original headline and replaced it with an appropriately-worded description.

In response to the complaint, the news media organization also took steps to circulate information to its newsrooms on the use of appropriate language and terminology when writing about people with disabilities and those who use mobility devices.

The National NewsMedia Council recognizes the role that appropriate language plays in accurately representing individuals and communities. In this case, it supports the news organization’s amendment of the headline and commends its decision to provide information to its newsrooms on appropriate use of language to prevent similar issues in the future.

The NNC considers this to be appropriate corrective action taken on the use of language in a headline.