



2021-11: E.F. v Simcoe Reformer

February 12, 2021 – *for immediate release*

The NewsMedia Council mediated and found that corrective action was taken to address a complaint about the disclosure of personal information and an identifying photograph in a January 20, 2021, article published by the Simcoe Reformer.

The article reported that local police had responded to an incident at a residence, which involved several road closures. The story included an identifying photo as well as direct quotes from an officer noting that concerns about a person's mental health played a role in the police response.

E.F. filed a complaint stating that published information and photograph published by the news organization was a breach of personal privacy. The complainant stated concern that coverage of an individual's mental health issue would deter others who may be experiencing mental health issues from seeking help in the future. The complainant also questioned whether the breach of privacy was racially motivated.

The news media organization responded to the complainant by removing the article from its website and apologizing to the complainant for the distress caused. It stated that while mental health stories are treated on a case-by-case basis, it has a long-standing practice to treat mental health issues with special sensitivity. It stated that in an effort to deliver news to the community in a timely manner, the article fell short of its standards.

The news media organization acknowledged that more sensitivity is needed with respect to reporting on mental health issues and has taken steps to ensure that similar errors do not happen in the future. Going forward, it plans to share resources with its newsroom on best practices for reporting on mental health. As well, future stories on the subject will include information on mental health services for readers who may find it helpful.

The NNC supports the view that journalists reporting on mental health issues should take care to avoid perpetuating stigma. Best practice in stories involving mental health issues is to include contact information for victims' services or mental health services.

The NNC has also held that while police are accepted as reliable sources of information, news media organizations have editorial discretion over their content and reporters are not bound to repeat police reports verbatim.

In this case, the NNC recognizes that there was a public interest in reporting on road closures. It also accepts that the article contained personal and identifying content that did not meet the news media organization's usual practices for reporting on mental health.

The NNC supports the news media organization's decision to remove the article swiftly, and welcomes the steps taken to ensure that reporting on mental health follows best practices going forward. The NNC

acknowledges the concern about racial motivation in the reporting, but found no evidence that the decision to publish the information and photograph was racially motivated.

For the reasons outlined above, the NNC found the complaint resolved due to corrective action.