



Photography of Homeless Individuals

1 message

Spencer Rava [REDACTED]

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To: "query.valliant@gmail.com" <query.valliant@gmail.com>

To whom it may concern,

My name is Spencer Rava, I am the Vice President of the Board of the Valliant Foundation, and am reaching out to you regarding my concerns surrounding the recent posts of homeless individuals on the Valliant Foundation Instagram

I'm writing to inform you that it is my opinion that these posts are unethical, tone-deaf, and not in the best interests of the individuals pictured. Additionally, it has come to my attention that the Marketing teams of Valliant view these posts as somehow beneficial for the Foundation for PR purposes.

I want to address a few things pertaining to these posts.

- Firstly, I'd like to point out that you will not find any pictures of homeless individuals on any other social media platforms of nonprofits in the SF Bay Area that work with these populations. This is for many reasons which I will get into later in this email. Please conduct your own research, and you will find that this is not at all normal for service based organizations. Most often, nonprofit organizations will use stock photos on their websites to fill space or for design purposes, but never pictures of actual unhoused individuals. If they do include photos (which is very rare), they are without faces, and of large groups of people. Ex: a line of people at a soup kitchen.
- Secondly, a significant reason that I find this to be unethical is that there is no good reason to utilize unhoused bodies and/or faces for marketing or PR purposes. To those who make this argument, I suggest you re-evaluate how you view the demographics that we as an organization are supposed to be helping. There are plenty of other ways to raise awareness and show the world how Valliant makes an impact. If certain individuals believe that utilizing pictures of homeless individuals is essential for PR, you need to reconsider the field that you're in. There is no harm in protecting the privacy of unhoused folks.
- Thirdly, while it has been brought to my attention that volunteers and other Valliant staff are trained on what informed consent means as it pertains to this matter, I believe there may be some misconceptions in terms of how this is being taught. Additionally, regardless of whether unhoused people consent to their picture being taken, these folks are still at some of the lowest if not the lowest points in their lives, and may change their minds if they find themselves in a better place in life at some point down the road. This is not to say that homeless individuals are not capable of giving consent, but that it is important as an organization to protect the privacy and dignity of the vulnerable populations that we work with. I shouldn't have to state this, (but I will), homelessness has significant effects on the body and the mind, and it is safe to assume that a significant portion of the individuals whom we provide services to are not in a state of mind to where they can give consent to having their photo taken and posted on the internet for the world to see. Once again, regardless of how sober, cognisant, and aware a Valliant staff member perceives a person to be, they can never be 100% sure of an individual's state of mind. Moreover, we do not have any licensed mental health practitioners on staff as of this moment, which are the qualifications that a person would need to surely determine a person's mental state, especially with the vulnerable populations that we work with.
- Lastly, I would argue that the recent posts on social media as well as any future posts depicting unhoused folks reflect very poorly on the organization, as the public may share my opinion; that these posts are ignorant, insensitive, and have a blatant disregard for the dignity and privacy of homeless individuals. This is to say, whoever thinks that these posts are somehow beneficial to the organization may find that they have the opposite effect.

Finally, I'd like to provide some of my work experience/credentials to provide some credibility to myself and my opinion. I hold a Bachelor's degree in Criminology and a minor in Sociology, and specialized in Psychology as the focus for my major. I have professional and volunteer experience working with underprivileged youth, incarcerated individuals, children and families involved in Child Protective services, as well as populations experiencing or facing homelessness. I am currently employed as a Social Worker at a non-profit organization in Oakland, Family Support Services, that works with a few of the vulnerable populations that I have just mentioned. I was formerly employed in a research and development capacity at Questbridge, an organization that works to connect underprivileged highschool seniors to full ride college scholarships. I am not by any means a senior in my field, however it is safe to say that I have significant experience working with underprivileged populations, as well as being well versed in relevant issues that are directly connected to my educational background.

This issue, however, is not about me, but the vulnerable populations that we as an organization are supposed to help and protect. Please consider the points that I have made in your decision regarding this matter.

Please feel free to reach out with any questions or concerns. I've listed my phone number below.

Regards,

Spencer Rava

Vice President of the Board

[REDACTED]