

SAMM NI

Support After Murder & Manslaughter

SAMM NI SUBMISSION TO Leveson Inquiry on CULTURE, PRACTICE AND ETHICS OF THE PRESS

SAMM NI, Support After Murder and Manslaughter Northern Ireland, is the regional branch of the independently registered charity SAMM National, which offers free confidential help and vital peer support to families and close friends bereaved through murder or manslaughter. SAMM is involved in training, research, raising public awareness and increasing the understanding of agencies who work closely with the families. SAMM National has assisted in many reports, papers and television programmes, met with Members of Parliament and given evidence before a House of Lords Select Committee and at the House of Commons Home Affairs Committee.

SAMM NI was founded in 2006 and all our specially trained volunteers have themselves been bereaved through murder or manslaughter and are prepared to share their experience with others thrown into our situation. SAMM NI has given evidence to the Northern Ireland Assembly's Committee for Justice on traumatically bereaved families' experiences of the criminal justice process. Referrals are made to SAMM NI by PSNI Family Liaison Officers, Victim Support NI and by self-referral. SAMM NI has been involved in the training of the PSNI's Family Liaison Officers since 2006 and has given presentations to many agencies within the Criminal Justice System on the impact of losing a loved one through murder and manslaughter.

SAMM NI was very aware of the extra pressure and distress intense media attention and intrusion was causing the families, but needed factual independent evidence before calling for changes to the methods journalists were using to obtain interviews with the grieving families and also to campaign for improved press regulation in general. In 2010 SAMM NI commissioned The University of Ulster, Jordanstown to investigate this serious issue and produce the enclosed report on our behalf.

SAMM NI is calling for a Code which will see journalists:

- ◆ Recognise a family's fears that speaking to the media might prejudice a legal case;
- ◆ Refrain from intrusion at funerals, or "door-stepping" family members for information or interviews;
- ◆ Be honest and not mislead anyone in pursuit of an interview with a family member;
- ◆ Acknowledge it is not appropriate to attempt direct contact with families, but to use the official intermediaries, such as police Family Liaison Officers;
- ◆ Refrain from publishing unsubstantiated rumour and stick to known facts;
- ◆ If families grant an interview, ensure they have an opportunity before publication to satisfy themselves with the factual accuracy of stories, without prejudice to the editorial independence of the publication;

- * Seek approval for the use of all photography relating to the loved one and the circumstances of their death;
- * Not publish distressing photographs, such as the removal of a loved one's remains in a body bag;
- * Warn families if there is an intention to run stories or photography relating to the death of their loved one, weeks, months and years later.

SAMM NI would suggest that more accessible and detailed information on handling the media and how to complain be included in Bereavement Guides given to families after a murder. Some of the families SAMM NI support felt alone and unable to complain about the press attention, others did complain to editors but were deeply disappointed with the responses and if an apology was printed it received no prominence in the next edition of the newspaper

SAMM NI is also calling for the appointment of a Press Ombudsman for Northern Ireland. Families here feel the Press Complaints Commission only monitors the press in Great Britain. A local Ombudsman would give families great comfort.

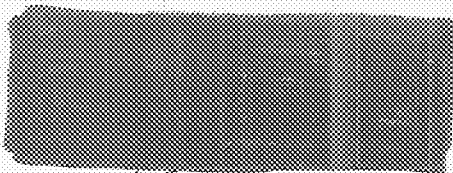
The Ombudsman could also ensure ethics are included in all journalism training, and that journalists are offered and avail of on-going refresher courses.

SAMM NI welcomes this opportunity to present our report and suggestions for change and looks forward to Lord Justice Leveson's findings in due course.

Statement of Truth

I believe the facts stated in this witness statement are true.

Signed:

A large black rectangular redaction box covering the signature of the witness.

Date: 28th January 2012