



N.S. couple in self-isolation gets targeted with rage, then loads of kindness

The Richardsons asked if someone could grab groceries for them, and the response was swift and angry

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The Richardsons of Elmsdale, N.S., are volunteers who provide hot meals to seniors in the community. But this time, they needed a favour. If anyone was headed to the store, would they please pick up a few groceries for them. They weren't prepared for the backlash. 2:57

All Tammie and Robert Richardson, of Elmsdale, N.S., needed were a few groceries.

On Wednesday, Robert asked on Facebook whether anyone headed to the supermarket would also pick up some items for them.

They were self-isolated due to Tammie's exposure at the continuing-care home where she works. Tammie learned Friday evening she tested negative for COVID-19.

The couple, who volunteers by providing hot meals to about a dozen seniors, and fosters disabled ginger-coloured cats, thought it would be all right to turn to the community for a favour.

Within nine minutes, five people responded with rage.

'I'm like, what is going on?'

"They were saying how dare I ask with the COVID-19 virus, or how can you ask somebody to do that, what were you thinking," Robert said in an interview from his home.

He's still shaking his head at the blast of "hurtful" comments that forced him to take down the post.

He showed his wife a few of the comments and they were shocked.

"I'm like, what is going on?" he said.

After all, arranging to have groceries dropped off instead of going into a store is the instruction from public health to people in self-isolation.

Tammie works at The Magnolia in Enfield, N.S. It's dealing with an outbreak after two residents and three workers tested positive for COVID-19.



Of the 70 residents at The Magnolia, a continuing-care facility in Enfield, N.S., two are infected with COVID-19, but have not been hospitalized. (Rosecrest Communities)

Tammie, a continuing-care assistant, came into contact with the virus after washing the hair of a resident who is infected. She is "on egg shells" as she awaits test results.

The backlash on Facebook just made things worse. "People crapped on him for it when he was trying to make sure that he wasn't spreading anything if he has it," said Tammie.

The couple have been on guard against COVID-19 ever since it emerged in Nova Scotia.

They haven't slept in the same bedroom in weeks because Robert has chronic obstructive pulmonary disease. The lung condition is so debilitating he is unable to work — coronavirus is especially threatening to him.



Dr. Simon Sherry is a psychologist and professor at Dalhousie University. (Jerry West/CBC)

Dr. Simon Sherry, a psychologist and professor at Dalhousie University, said the perceived threat people are feeling from the pandemic is bringing out hostility, which some are emboldened to express online.

"They are more likely to be disagreeable and less likely to be pro-social," he said.

"Social isolation is corrosive to altruistic behaviour," he said.

'Everyone should help each other'

Like for so many during the pandemic, business has tanked for Sean Kenalty, a real estate agent. He was working from home when he saw the "ridiculous" posts where people seemed to be piling on Robert.

It struck him that Robert, who feared he might be infected, was "terrified" to go to the store. So, he decided to go.

Kenalty left mayonnaise, ice tea, gravy mix and ice cream on their doorstep, briefly chatted with Robert from the driveway, and accepted a \$28 e-transfer for the food.

"Everyone should help each other during — I don't even want to say during this time because everyone should just help each other," he said.



Even though the real estate business has slowed down for Sean Kenalty, he's happy to keep helping others with things like picking up groceries. (Sinead Dubeau)

Robert returned to Facebook to publicly thank Kenalty for stepping up.

But this time the response was overwhelmingly positive. After one day, there were more than a thousand likes, 270 comments from people offering to pick up the next grocery order, well-wishes for the couple, and thanks to Robert and Kenalty for doing the right thing.

'We shouldn't be hateful or mean'

Jennifer Mahoney was "completely disgusted" by what the Richardsons initially encountered. She's showing the Richardsons compassion after getting to know them through an online recipe sharing group they started. She also knows them for their volunteer work.



Jennifer Mahoney says she's gotten to know the Richardsons as a caring, giving couple. (Jennifer Mahoney)

"We shouldn't be hateful or mean to anyone," she said. "We should be trying to help each other."

To help the couple while Tammie is unable to work, Mahoney has started a GoFundMe campaign.

Robert said the gesture is "heartwarming" but doesn't want to catch even more heat for accepting donations.

Besides, he'd rather give the money to seniors in need of groceries.

"I'd rather go without and see someone else have than for me to have something and someone else not," Robert said.