



THE TRAGEDY OF MISSING AND MURDERED ABORIGINAL WOMEN IN CANADA

WE CAN DO BETTER

A POSITION PAPER BY THE SISTERWATCH PROJECT
OF THE VANCOUVER POLICE DEPARTMENT
AND THE WOMEN'S MEMORIAL MARCH COMMITTEE

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VANCOUVER POLICE DEPARTMENT | *Beyond the Call*





20TH ANNUAL WOMEN'S MEMORIAL MARCH – FEBRUARY 14, 2011

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I have a few family members missing on the Highway of Tears. I have four daughters so it really scares me...We didn't just come down here and decide to be a drug addict or an alcoholic or a prostitute. There are many reasons – usually domestic violence in the community leads a lot of the women to get away from the violence. And then they come down here and they're back into a violent situation again...There's not enough being done when it comes to First Nations women going missing. These are our loved ones, our children, and when they go missing, it tears a piece out of the whole family.

GLADYS RADEK
WALK FOR JUSTICE CO-FOUNDER

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The number of missing and murdered Aboriginal women in Canada is a national tragedy.

- Aboriginal women between 25 and 44 are five times more likely to die a violent death than other women.
- Aboriginal women make up four percent of the female population but the majority of missing and murdered women.
- The Native Women's Association of Canada database includes 582 known cases of missing and murdered Aboriginal women and girls, the majority having occurred between 1990 and 2010.

This report is based on consultations between members of the Women's Memorial March Committee and Vancouver Police officers and outlines the current problems, actions that have been taken in response, and recommendations to address remaining gaps, including a unique police/community collaboration model called SisterWatch.

Aboriginals comprise only four percent of the population in Canada but their numbers are increasing faster than Canada's population overall. Aboriginals are more likely than other Canadians to be marginalized and are consequently significantly over-represented both as victims and suspects in crime. Aboriginal women are disproportionately the victims of violence, including murder. A longstanding concern is that the criminal justice system fails to recognize the customs, values and traditions of Aboriginal people.

Vancouver's Downtown Eastside "Missing Women" case is a tragic example of how marginalized women – including many Aboriginals – can become victims of serious

crime. In this case, the perpetrator was the notorious Robert Pickton, Canada's worst serial killer. Pickton should have been apprehended sooner and the police investigations were initially inadequate. Later on, the police in BC formed a Missing Women Task Force to investigate the disappearances and were successful in obtaining six murder convictions against Pickton. There is also an ongoing BC investigation into missing and murdered women in Northern BC along Highway 16 – also known as the "Highway of Tears." Other provinces, including Alberta and Manitoba, have also formed task forces to focus on missing and murdered women, many of them Aboriginal.

There are many challenges to investigating missing Aboriginal women, including investigative capacity; the mobility of the victims; a lack of coordination between police agencies; delays in reporting; and a lack of police access to useful databases.

In recent years, there have been many initiatives to address the problem of missing and murdered Aboriginal women as set out in this report and in Appendix "A."

There remain, however, gaps in both prevention efforts and police investigative capacity. Some of the most significant challenges in missing women investigations are barriers to reporting across jurisdictions. These barriers can be reduced by creating a "clearing house" model both nationally and provincially, with 1-800 phone numbers to facilitate reporting. While Internet-based reporting and coordination has been introduced in some provinces, it does not exist Canada-wide. Moreover, marginalized people do not have ready access to the Internet and the process to report must be as barrier-free as possible.



More work by all police agencies is required to build better relationships with Aboriginal communities. There is a legacy of mistrust and perceptions of police apathy from the community that must be overcome. In addition, police must proactively target predatory offenders who prey on Aboriginal women. The Vancouver Police Department and the Women's Memorial March Committee have developed a program called "SisterWatch" to address both these issues and encourage other communities to consider a similar program.

This report reiterates recommendations from previous reports on the problem of missing and murdered Aboriginal women, and also recommends a national and provincial clearing house model with 1-800 phone numbers; harmonized legislation to provide for better access to databases helpful to missing persons investigations; and consideration of the SisterWatch program for other communities.

INTRODUCTION

The number of missing and murdered Aboriginal women in Canada is a national tragedy. Despite making up only four percent of the Canadian female population, women of Aboriginal descent make up the majority of women who are missing and murdered. Aboriginal women between 25 and 44 are five times more likely to die a violent death than other women.¹ The issue of violence against women generally touches many; however, the Aboriginal community has obviously been impacted far more than the average Canadian family. The issue of violence against Aboriginal women is a complex one involving social, economic and cultural factors. These factors are also played out in the extraordinary number of Aboriginal women in Canada who go missing, and in some cases are murdered, each year. These stark statistics of the murdered and missing demand a national coordinated response.

Much credit must go to Amnesty International’s 2004 report, *Stolen Sisters - A Human Rights Response to Violence and Discrimination Against Indigenous Women* and the follow-

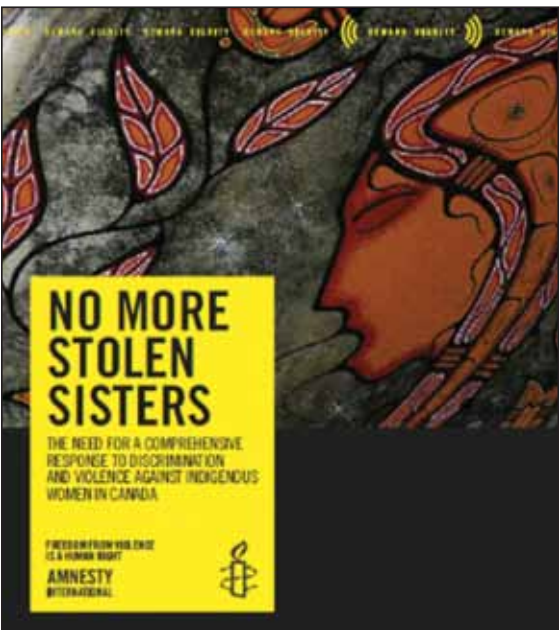


The Missing Women cases have affected me personally because I feel a lot of pain; I feel a lot of anger. I feel really impacted by the loss of these women. It’s very hard on our Nation as a whole.

MONA WOODWARD
SPARKLING FAST RISING RIVER WOMAN
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
ABORIGINAL FRONT DOOR SOCIETY

up report, *No More Stolen Sisters* in 2009, and to the Native Women’s Association of Canada which have been catalysts to increasing attention to this issue by governments, police agencies and police associations.²

The purpose of this report is to summarize the nature and depth of the problem; identify actions that have been taken, have been proposed, or are in progress; and to recommend what more should be done at the local, provincial and national levels to ensure an evidence-based, best practice approach to addressing an unacceptable situation. Because solutions to social challenges such as this require cooperation and collaboration in the community, this report was written as a collaborative effort between the Vancouver Police Department (VPD) and the Vancouver Women’s Memorial March Committee (WMMC).³ This joint committee, called the “SisterWatch Committee,” was brought



together after the tragic death of a young Aboriginal woman in the Downtown Eastside in 2010 and the resulting community distress.

This committee serves to build relationships and opens doors to further collaboration. The VPD and the WMMC's SisterWatch Committee also share a sad history involving

the Missing Women of the Downtown Eastside of Vancouver and the subsequent arrest of serial killer Robert Pickton. But the SisterWatch Committee is something truly positive that came out of those sad events and now oversees a variety of initiatives to reduce violence against Aboriginal women in Vancouver, as described later in this report.

PART I: BACKGROUND CONTEXT

Aboriginals in Canada

According to the 2006 census, approximately 1.1 million people in Canada (or about 4% of the total population) identified themselves as an Aboriginal person (i.e., First Nations, Métis or Inuit). While only a small percentage of the Canadian population is Aboriginal, it is growing rapidly, with a 45% increase between 1996 and 2006. Aboriginal people are increasingly living in urban areas, with significant populations in Winnipeg, Edmonton, and Vancouver. With a population of slightly more than 40,000, Vancouver has the third largest urban Aboriginal population in Canada. Finally, the Aboriginal population is much younger than the non-Aboriginal population, with almost half being under 24, compared to only 31% of the non-Aboriginal population.⁴

Violence in Aboriginal Communities

In 1996, a Canadian Royal Commission on Aboriginal People found that, “[r]epeated assaults on the culture and collective identity of aboriginal people have weakened the foundations of aboriginal society and contributed to the alienation that drives some to self-destruction and anti-social behaviour.”⁵ Many researchers have found that, compared to non-Aboriginals, Aboriginals are more likely to live in poverty and substandard housing;⁶ have lower levels of educational achievement;⁷ have poorer health, including much higher rates of diabetes, HIV/AIDS and tuberculosis;⁸ have higher rates of alcohol and drug dependency;⁹ suffer higher rates of victimization by crime, particularly relationship violence;¹⁰ have higher youth suicide rates;¹¹ and are more likely to have negative contact with the criminal justice system, including over-representation in



All Aboriginal women are subjected to the racism and the sexualization that history has constructed around Aboriginal women as sexualized creatures of disposal...Aboriginal women have to have a reason to trust. Where there was developed a very strong feeling of distrust, police will have to do a lot more.

GLORIA LAROCQUE
ABORIGINAL FRONT DOOR BOARD MEMBER

federal and provincial prisons.¹² Notably, the homicide rate for Aboriginals is almost seven times higher than the rate for non-Aboriginals, and Aboriginals are accused of homicide at a rate 10 times that of non-Aboriginals.¹³

The reasons for Aboriginals’ over-representation in these negative contexts are many and complex, but certainly include a history of institutionalized racism and discrimination. Though there are many examples of this throughout history, the most visible manifestation of such discrimination was the federal government’s emphasis on assimilation and the residential school system it implemented in the 1870s. It took until the 1990s for this system to be completely

dismantled and the impacts of it will be felt for many generations to come.¹⁴ In 2008 Prime Minister Harper made a formal apology on behalf of all Canadians for the history and legacy of Aboriginal residential schools.¹⁵

The impacts of the injustices suffered by Canada’s Aboriginal peoples have been profound. One of the most troubling is that Aboriginal women are victimized at a much higher rate than the overall rate of violence against women in Canada. For example, as described earlier, a 1996 report from the federal government notes that Aboriginal women between the ages of 25 and 44 with status under the federal *Indian Act* are five times more likely than all other women in the same age range to die as the result of violence.¹⁶ Further, a 2004 government survey of Aboriginal women and a 2011 Statistics Canada report both revealed rates of violence (including domestic violence and sexual assault) up to 3.5 times higher than for non-Aboriginal women.¹⁷ Like most gendered violence, much of it is difficult to quantify, and underreporting occurs for complex reasons, including distrust of authorities and shame.¹⁸ A longstanding concern is that the criminal justice system fails to recognize the customs, values and traditions of Aboriginal people.

Also contributing to the level of victimization experienced by Aboriginal women is the high number that become involved in the sex trade. Many marginalized young Aboriginal women find themselves drawn into the street level sex industry and find themselves trapped in “survival sex work” because of illicit drug addictions. A 2004 survey in Vancouver of 183 women (30% of whom were Aboriginal) in the sex trade found that 65% began selling sexual services because they needed money, or because of their drug addiction.¹⁹ Sadly, drug addiction was cited as the reason for continuing in the sex trade by 60% of the women surveyed.



Missing women across this nation is a bigger issue that requires a lot more discussion to be able to get behind the underlying reasons, systemic reasons why women go missing or are murdered... Sometimes women are involved in sex trade work out of survival to be able to put food on the table for their families. It's not a choice that women easily make or want to.

MARLENE GEORGE
WOMEN'S MEMORIAL MARCH COMMITTEE

As described in the VPD’s “Missing Women Investigation Review,”²⁰ sex trade workers in Canada are frequent victims of violent attacks. They are particularly vulnerable to attacks from predatory customers, but also from pimps, boyfriends, or in drug-related incidents.²¹ The murder risk for sex trade workers is approximately 60 to 120 times that of the general female population.²² According to some research, sex trade workers are the most likely victims of a serial killer. Further, the most highly addicted and desperate sex trade workers are more likely than other sex trade workers to be the victims of a serial killer.²³ In Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside, one media report noted that:

...the truth is that there are numerous predators attacking sex trade workers on a regular basis. A review of *The Vancouver Sun* files shows at least 25 different men charged with killing prostitutes in BC over the last 17 years. In the past month alone, Vancouver city police arrested two men suspected in a series of sexual assaults against women in the sex trade.²⁴

CASE STUDY ► VANCOUVER'S MISSING WOMEN CASE

Since the late 1970s, very sporadically, women had gone missing from the Downtown Eastside area of Vancouver, but so infrequently that the cases didn't raise alarm with authorities. However, in the mid-1990s, the frequency with which poor, addicted sex trade workers were going missing began to provoke considerable community concern. Many believed a serial killer was responsible; however, some in the VPD did not support this theory and this contributed to an inadequate investigative response. In addition, the investigative challenges were enormous. There were no crime scenes, no witnesses, no physical evidence, and no victims; the only evidence was the absence of an increasing number of women.

This situation was further complicated by the fact that, as it turned out, the women were being lured to a property in the Vancouver suburb of Port Coquitlam, which is policed by a detachment of the RCMP. The Coquitlam RCMP received information about Robert Pickton from informants and witnesses in 1998 and 1999 but the investigations in Coquitlam and Vancouver operated independently for the most part. The resulting investigative silos contributed to many missed opportunities to solve the case sooner than it was. Eventually, a joint investigation of the RCMP and the VPD, the Missing Women Task Force (MWTF) was created in 2001.

In February of 2002, the serendipitous execution of an unrelated firearms search warrant by a member of the

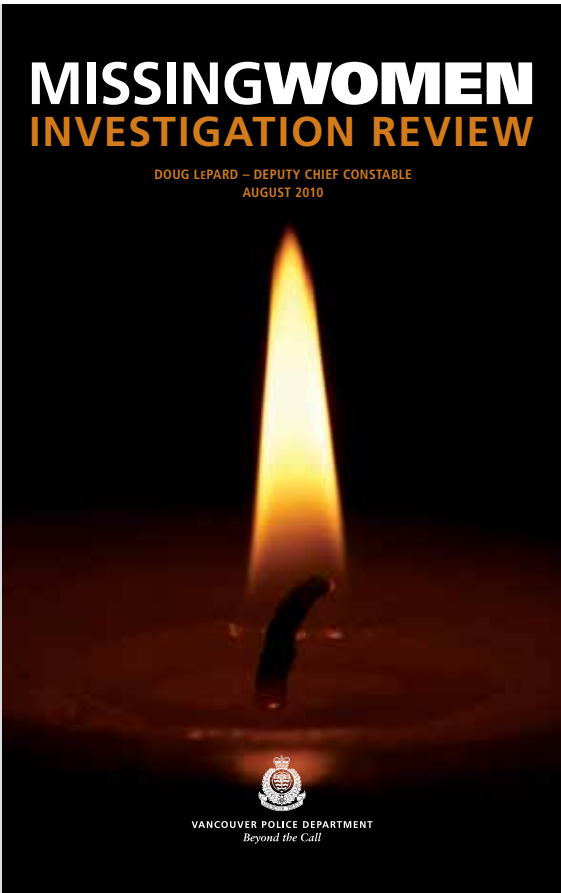


Coquitlam RCMP broke the case. Fortunately, the MWTF was able to immediately assume control of the investigation and successfully concluded the largest serial murder investigation in Canadian history. Six convictions of murder against Robert Pickton were obtained in relation to remains, DNA and other evidence found on Pickton's property involving at least 33 women who had gone missing between 1995 and 2001, inclusive. This was the same period during which the notable increase in missing women from the Downtown Eastside occurred (although some of the victims were missing from other communities in BC). Pickton boasted to an undercover police officer that he had killed 49 women. In total, Pickton was charged with 27 counts of murder. He was subsequently tried and convicted of six murders; these convictions were upheld in 2010 by the Supreme Court of Canada. Since Pickton could not receive any sentence longer than the life sentence he had already received, the Crown in BC decided to enter a stay of proceedings on the remaining 20 charges, which had been severed by the Court from the first six. (The 27th charge had been previously stayed by the trial judge.)

The VPD committed to learning what went wrong and doing so in a transparent manner. The VPD released its comprehensive report, the “Missing Women Investigation Review” (MWIR),²⁵ shortly after the conclusion of the criminal matters in 2010. (The report had been written several years earlier, but could not be released until the criminal matters were concluded.) In addition, the VPD’s apology for its failings in the case was broadcast live on a national network²⁶ and received considerable media coverage.

The recommendations in the MWIR directed to the VPD have all been implemented, including the institutionalization of major case management training and protocols; changes to the criteria for the selection of staff for various affected areas; an increase in the number of provincially accredited major case management team commanders; significantly improved resources, systems, and analysis; and improved management accountability.²⁷

Furthermore, the research for the MWIR identified significant problems in the Missing Person’s Unit. As a result, a full-time sergeant’s position was created in 2003 and later a detailed external audit of the Unit was commissioned. This audit resulted in 50 recommendations, all of which were implemented. The Missing Persons Unit is now viewed as a best-practice unit in Canada, has a 99% solve rate, and has received accolades for its work.²⁸



The VPD regrets the mistakes made in this investigation and resolved to learn from them and improve current practices with the hope that other families and police agencies will benefit from these lessons in the future.

The final review of this notorious case will be conducted by the Honourable Wally Oppal, QC, in a Missing Women Commission of Inquiry that is underway as of the date of this report.

The National Picture Regarding Missing and Murdered Aboriginal Women

Based on 2005 data, in Canada over 100,000 persons are reported missing annually.²⁹ More than half are teenagers, most of them runaways,³⁰ and the vast majority are found within weeks. Unfortunately, 4,800 persons were still recorded as missing after a year, and approximately 270 new cases of long term missing persons are reported annually.³¹

Aboriginal women have been disproportionately represented in these statistics. For example, a 2007 joint committee of government, Aboriginal Peoples, police and community groups in Saskatchewan reported that 60 per cent of the long-term cases of missing women in the province are Aboriginal, although Aboriginal women make up only six per cent of the population in Saskatchewan.³²

Accurate numbers are difficult to obtain, particularly due to reporting issues, but a recent estimate by the Native Women's Association of Canada (March 31, 2010) suggests that there are 582 known cases of missing or murdered Aboriginal women and girls in Canada, more than half of them since 1990.³³ The fact that there is no official government source for such information is in itself evidence of the need for better national analysis and coordination.

The September 2010 report of the Federal/Provincial/Territorial Missing Women Working Group noted that many of the missing and murdered women in Canada were Aboriginal. The report also noted that the women had a number of characteristics in common, including living in poverty; being homeless, transient, and lacking in social networks; addicted to alcohol or drugs; involved in sex work or other

PROJECT KARE

In Alberta in 2003, the RCMP created an integrated investigative team called Project Kare. According to its website, Project Kare is an investigational unit originally created to examine the deaths of several "high risk missing persons" who were found in rural areas surrounding the City of Edmonton. Kare has since expanded its mandate to include cases of murdered or missing high risk persons from all parts of Alberta. Project Kare includes staff from the RCMP, Edmonton and Calgary police services.

high risk practices such as hitchhiking; and experiencing mental health issues.³⁴ Moreover, according to research by the Native Women's Association of Canada, urban areas are the most risky for women and girls, finding that "70 percent of women and girls disappeared from an urban area, and 60 percent were murdered in an urban area."³⁵ This may be related to the fact that urban centres tend to have more vulnerable women as well as more predators who can perpetuate their crimes in the anonymity of a big city.

While cases of known missing and murdered Aboriginal women are concentrated in the western provinces, no region of Canada is immune; only Prince Edward Island does not have any cases listed in the Native Women's Association of Canada website.³⁶

National and Provincial Initiatives

As a result of high profile cases, and pressure from the community, several police agencies and associations have made significant efforts to address the problem of missing and murdered Aboriginal women. Initiatives such as task forces have been set up in several jurisdictions and a variety of actions have been taken at the municipal, provincial and federal levels, as described earlier. Several of the task forces are described in textboxes throughout this report, and Appendix “A” describes in more detail some of the major initiatives in Canada that have been implemented to support investigations and to increase awareness in both the community and among police agencies.

One of the more promising initiatives underway is a project to create a National Police Support Centre for Missing Children/Missing Persons and Unidentified Human Remains Investigations (known as “NPSCMP”). NPSCMP will encompass National Missing Children Services (NMCS) and expand support to all missing persons investigations as well as all unidentified remains investigations. Using a consolidated database and new public web site, in cooperation with regional partners, the program will put in place a network of support centres for police and coroner/medical examiner investigators across Canada. NPSCMP will operate the infrastructure and the national centre, supporting Canadian and international cases with case analysis as well as conducting research and promoting best practices for these types of investigations.

A key component of this new national databank will be a publicly-accessible website where members of the community may both review missing persons cases, and submit information to the police and other investigative agencies.

The new system (and the corresponding changes to CPIC, the Canadian Police Information Centre) will ensure that this locally-reported data gets transferred to the

MANITOBA TASK FORCE

In 2009, Manitoba formed a murdered and missing women task force. It is comprised of experienced investigators from the RCMP and the Winnipeg Police Service. The Province of Manitoba is represented on the task force’s steering committee. The mandate of the task force is to review and investigate unsolved homicide files involving female victims, review missing person files involving female victims where foul play is suspected, and to determine if any links exist between the cases.

national MC/MPUR database, and out to (yet to be fully-established) regional missing persons centres. The regional centres will also conduct comprehensive analysis and correlation of reported data, and ensure that local police departments are informed of each missing persons case, as well as trends in their jurisdiction, region, and province.

According to NPSCMP project staff, analysis of missing persons data in the new databank will be comprehensive. Leading-edge mathematical and statistical techniques will be used to sift through all of Canada’s missing persons reports to identify patterns and commonalities. Spatial and temporal analyses will attempt to identify any cases which may be related, and therefore in need of focus by investigators. The NPSCMP team will communicate any significant analytical results to the appropriate regional missing persons centre.³⁷

On October 29, 2010, the Honourable Rona Ambrose, Minister of Public Works and Government Services and Minister for Status of Women, announced at Vancouver Police Department Headquarters many important initiatives, including the MC/MPUR project described above, to address the “disturbingly high number of missing and murdered Aboriginal Women in Canada.”³⁸

Minister Ambrose also announced:³⁹

- the investment of \$10 million over two years to improve community safety and to ensure that the justice system and law enforcement agencies can better respond to cases of missing and murdered Aboriginal women;
- a new National Police Support Centre for Missing Persons to help police forces across Canada by providing coordination and specialized support in missing persons investigations;
- a national website to encourage the public to provide tips and information on missing persons cases and unidentified human remains;
- enhancing the CPIC database to capture additional missing persons data;
- amendments to the *Criminal Code* to streamline the warrants application process where wiretaps are required in missing person cases; and
- a comprehensive list of best practices to help communities, law enforcement and justice partners in future work.

PART II: INVESTIGATIVE CHALLENGES

The Challenges to Investigations of Missing and Murdered Aboriginal Women

It is a tragic sign of the size and scope of the problem that there have been or continue to be multiple investigations in Canada into missing/murdered women, many of whom are Aboriginal, including cases of serial murder. BC, Alberta and Manitoba have all formed large task forces/ joint operations (e.g., Missing Women Task Force, EPANA regarding the Highway of Tears case,^{40, 41} Project Kare,⁴² and the Manitoba Task Force⁴³) to deal with the investigations of large numbers of women who have gone missing or been murdered.

However, there are many challenges unique to the investigation of murdered and missing Aboriginal women. These challenges are related to the lifestyle and characteristics of the victims, the nature of the crimes where foul play is involved, and the lack of adequate resourcing or expertise in some police agencies.

This report only outlines a few of the factors that impact this type of investigation. Those listed here tend to have the biggest impact on the investigation and thus are most relevant to any discussion about protection of these vulnerable women.

Lack of Police Investigative Expertise and Capacity

While larger police forces usually have missing persons units, there are many medium-size and small police agencies in Canada that do not. For small communities in particular, the critical mass may not exist to have a specialized unit or to develop the investigative proficiency desired. Further, an Amnesty International brief points out that most police agencies do not have policies and procedures specific to the issue of missing Aboriginal women.⁴⁴ This is particularly relevant for Aboriginal communities. Being sensitive to the community, particularly in small rural areas, will help build the community’s trust in the police and encourage them to report people who are missing.

The numbers of missing and murdered women, and the number of investigations that are needed, emphasizes the need for specialized resources within all police agencies, either directly, or through participation in a regional unit, or through the development of protocols with nearby larger agencies. National or provincial standards for the investigations would be beneficial in ensuring that every agency follows best practices for the investigation of missing persons – particularly Aboriginal and marginalized people – and that staff are adequately trained, both in relevant investigative techniques and the unique aspects of missing person investigations. It is important that the affected communities should be consulted in developing these standards. As the ones most impacted by the police actions, it will ensure that the community’s needs are respected. Further, having standards for this type of investigation, clear expectations of the officers, and sensitivity to the culture of the community will help to avoid situations of perceived apathy, ignorance, or neglect of those at risk.

It is noteworthy that the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police (CACP) is advocating for such standards, they are a part of the new



I was an addict in the Downtown Eastside. There was this program about someone arresting this pig farmer and I was feeling sick because I had just been there. I could have been one of those women. Missing and murdered Aboriginal women is...a social issue. It’s important for the police in Canada to step up and say...“this is not ok.”

LISA YELLOW-QUILL
BLUE THUNDERBIRD WOMAN/STRONG
MEDICINE WOMAN STANDING
CO-MANAGER ABORIGINAL WOMEN’S
PROGRAM/STV COUNSELLOR
BATTERED WOMEN’S SUPPORT SERVICES

NPSCMP’s mandate, and significant NPSCMP consultation with stakeholders is occurring.

The Mobility of Missing Persons

Investigations into missing persons are difficult when the person is known to be transient. Obviously, those who move frequently, or who do not have a consistent place to call home, can be challenging to find. Determination of when they were last seen and where they went missing from, as well as where they can be located, is more complicated than for those who are less mobile.

As a whole, Aboriginal people living off-reserve move more frequently than other people living in Canada. A 2001 report noted that “off-reserve Registered Indian women in all age groups were the most likely to report having moved in the past five years.”⁴⁵ This may result in missing Aboriginal women having limited community connections, posing problems for reporting and police response.



Police in Canada need to ensure there is cross-jurisdictional communication about people who are missing... and they need to also set a standard for themselves in how to deal with marginalized people.

KATE GIBSON
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
WISH DROP-IN CENTRE SOCIETY

Because this is a problem that is more frequent within Aboriginal communities, it is crucially important that police agencies build good relationships with Aboriginal communities in both urban and rural settings. This may be particularly relevant in urban settings given the increased risk of victimization that Aboriginal women face there. These relationships can be built in a variety of ways, both official and unofficial, but the key is for the police to be engaged with the vulnerable populations in their communities.

Lack of Coordination Among Police Agencies

The high level of mobility of Aboriginal women in Canada may result in weaker ties to community and family. Further, in many cases family members are in different jurisdictions from the missing person, complicating reporting to police. And while 81 percent of Canada's population lives in cities, only 54 percent of Aboriginals do.⁴⁶ This means a significant number live in small communities, in rural areas and on reserves, which may increase the challenges for effective investigations, because of a lack of specialized

resources. In addition, several different policing jurisdictions may be involved, which can create many problems. These include the potential for patterns of offending to be missed thus reducing the seriousness with which the problem is viewed, inadequate communication, and lack of policing capacity to address the problem, among others. These problems are compounded by the increased mobility of Aboriginals compared to Canadians overall. Consistent policing standards could help address these challenges, particularly in under-resourced areas.

Coordination is the most difficult to accomplish but is the most important because it has the greatest potential to impact this problem. A significant number of missing women come from small and under-resourced communities. Their police agencies (including First Nations police services) may be under-resourced as well and patterns across several communities may not be detected because the missing women are considered in isolation as "one-offs." This situation can contribute to an under-reaction by the community and by police agencies. For example, under current investigative practices, women may go missing from a number of isolated communities. These cases may be linked, and foul play may be a factor, yet this fact will not be recognized by the police community because of a lack of communication and coordination. As each case is currently reported separately to a different investigator at the victim's local police agency or detachment, the existence of multiple individual cases may not be noticed unless there is significant communication between the police agencies about cases in their areas. Potentially, a serial offender may be at work, and what may be the only evidence – an unexplained spike in the number of missing women – may not be readily apparent.

Complicating this scenario is the fact that these communities may be in different provinces, making the likelihood of the incidents being connected even lower.

Therefore, it is important that there is analysis on a regional, provincial and national level to identify anomalous patterns of missing Aboriginal women on an inter-jurisdictional basis, and to look for linkages between cases. BC and other provinces have made significant progress in this regard, as will be described later in this report. In addition, the NPSCMP is now mandated to assist with coordination. Finally, best practices developed by the NPSCMP and the CACP will also help improve the quality of analysis.

Delays in Reporting

As was the case in Vancouver's Missing Women serial murder case, marginalized people are often not reported missing for lengthy periods of time – weeks, months, years and, in some cases, even decades after they were last seen. This time delay creates incredible challenges for police investigators, because of a lack of a clear timeline, witnesses, forensics or suspects when foul play is involved. Historically, police did not treat a missing persons case as one of foul play unless there was clear evidence of such. Some agencies' policies have now changed to require that all missing persons cases be treated as "suspicious" until there is evidence to the contrary.⁴⁷ Further, police agencies have become more aware of the significance of spikes in the number of reported missing people, particularly when the missing persons are considered highly vulnerable to victimization.

Lack of Access to Useful Databases

An important investigative strategy for locating missing persons is accessing non-police databases, such as social assistance, health, employment, bank or utilities records. In Vancouver's Missing Women case, difficulty accessing health records from other provinces was a significant barrier in the investigation, with privacy legislation often cited. With a missing persons investigation and no crime

HIGHWAY OF TEARS

According to the BC All Chiefs' Task Force, BC's "Highway of Tears," Hwy 16 between Prince George and Prince Rupert, has seen 32 women missing or murdered since 1969, most of whom were young Aboriginal women. The RCMP's investigation, "EPANA," has a mandate to analyze each relevant file to determine if there is sufficient evidence to support the theory that a serial killer is responsible, and to develop and implement strategies that will advance the investigations. The cases span a time frame from 1969 to 2006 and cover an area from Prince Rupert to the north, Kamloops and Merritt to the south, and Hinton, Alberta to the east.

known to have occurred, no search warrant is available to overcome this problem. In the Vancouver case, persistent efforts, including written requests, assistance from the Provincial Coroner, and other appeals, helped police to overcome these barriers. Using a variety of databases, in particular provincial health records, Vancouver Police investigators were able to locate several missing women living in other provinces and the United States. These women would not have been located without police access to these databases.

One solution to this challenge would be for federal, provincial and territorial governments to develop harmonized legislation that would allow police access to personal information of persons reported missing, as has been recommended in several reports⁴⁸ and in a resolution by the Alberta Chiefs of Police.⁴⁹ In May 2011, Alberta passed the first such legislation in Canada and this could be used as a model for other provinces.⁵⁰ Not only would having such legislation allow police agencies access to important information to locate individuals, it would also mean that record holder agencies from different areas would

be operating from the same privacy framework thus allowing timely access to relevant information.

Lack of Data

Police-reported crime data in general is known to underestimate actual crime and this is particularly relevant in missing persons cases. There are likely more missing Aboriginal (and otherwise marginalized) women than have been reported because of a variety of barriers to reporting. According to the report of the Federal/Provincial/Territorial Missing Women Working Group, barriers include a lack of public understanding of when and how to make a report, as well as systemic problems with police taking reports and regularly entering them on appropriate databases, including the national Canadian Police Information Center (CPIC) computer network.⁵¹

As a result, the data that is known about missing women is often incomplete or out of date. In part, the issues stem from police policies and practices that are not conducive to these types of cases. Further, due to delays associated with manual data entry, police databases are not able to include up-to-the-minute information. CPIC, while a good resource in many cases, is not a sufficiently searchable national database and is therefore less valuable as an investigative tool for missing persons. Finally, there are consistency problems with the data (such as whether the person is known or just suspected to be missing, and whether they have any particular risk factors) which makes it difficult to link cases where there are commonalities.⁵²

PART III: SOLUTIONS AND NEXT STEPS

Closing the Gaps: What’s Still Needed

A great deal of work has occurred in government and police agencies at the municipal, provincial and national levels, and this is commendable. However, there is much more that can be done to reduce the number of missing and murdered Aboriginal women in Canada.

The majority of the efforts and improvements to date have focused on improving the police investigative response going forward, and in creating task forces for specific investigations. In addition, there have been improvements in information collection, but these efforts are inconsistent across jurisdictions, with great

variability in the level and sophistication of resources across Canada. Much more needs to be done to provide uniform systems for collecting, analyzing, coordinating and taking action on the information received. These are all areas that are currently within the power of governments and police agencies to significantly improve. More challenging, but most importantly, more needs to be done to reduce the likelihood of Aboriginal women going missing and being murdered in the first place; this will require more attention to the systemic causes of marginalization that occur among Aboriginal women. While this is a daunting, ongoing task, it must be a priority. Further, those tasks that can be accomplished in the shorter term must receive urgent attention.

Below are several proposals designed to reduce barriers to reporting, improve the response to reports of missing Aboriginal women, and improve relationships between police agencies and Aboriginal communities.

Provincial Centralized “Clearing Houses” With 1-800 Phone Numbers

There are two areas for improvement related to reporting. First, in some cases, people are unclear about to whom they should report a missing person. They may live in one community but the missing person may have disappeared from another community. Second, even if they do manage to report the person missing to a local police department, the information may or may not be received by the police jurisdiction responsible for the community where the person was last seen, thus delaying (or eliminating the possibility of) a proper investigation. As demonstrated in the Vancouver Missing Women investigation, a person could be reported missing in one community, but the information wouldn’t become known to the community from which the person had actually gone missing. For example, the person would be reported missing in community “A” because that’s where her family lived and the information would be placed on CPIC. But community “B,” the location from which the person went missing, wouldn’t be alerted and neither jurisdiction would be actively looking for her. Alternatively, a reportee in community “A” would be told they had to call the police in community “B” to make the report, but would be unable to get through to that jurisdiction’s report line, or might be dissuaded because of long distance charges, a misunderstanding about the process, or inconsistent police practices.⁵³

Obviously, it is impossible for police to investigate cases that they have no knowledge of and increasing the accessibility of reporting for missing persons would improve police

investigations and increase the probability of an earlier identification and subsequent arrest of an active serial killer. In the wake of Pickton’s arrest in the Vancouver Missing Women case in 2002, then-Vancouver Councillor Lynne Kennedy chaired a committee and facilitated six meetings that included sex trade workers and grassroots advocacy groups. The Committee’s goal was to identify ways to prevent such situations from occurring in the future. One of the recommendations of the committee’s report to Vancouver Council was that a 1-800 phone number should be created:

Over the past 20 years we have seen too many examples of how the process for reporting missing people is seriously flawed. From the victims of Clifford Olsen to the missing women from the Downtown Eastside...we are faced with the inadequacy of the current system. One of the most important recommendations to come out of the consultation sessions was that a 1-800 number needs to be set up to report missing people. It should provide up to date information on the case as well as what the concerned individuals can do to help in the search. This tip line should be a regional source for police, so that the missing person’s loved ones don’t have to make a report to individual municipalities.⁵⁴

In March 2005, Ms. Kennedy, by then a member of the Vancouver Police Board, made the same recommendation to a Parliamentary Subcommittee on Solicitation Laws.⁵⁵

While efforts to improve relationships between the community and police can potentially reduce barriers to reporting, they do not necessarily improve coordination between agencies, or improve access to police for families living outside of the jurisdiction where the missing person was last seen.

As a result, it is proposed that there should be a provincial 1-800 number to take reports of missing persons. The purpose would not be to replace existing intake processes in various jurisdictions; rather, it would be used to provide an additional point of access. Further, a centralized “clearing house” model would ensure that cases would not fall between the cracks, in that the clearing house could liaise with the appropriate police agency of jurisdiction to ensure an investigation is initiated and supported.

This could be accomplished in BC by increasing the capacity of the existing BC Police Missing Persons Centre. The BCPMPC currently has three authorized positions but is seeking approval for an additional three positions. Though they currently only provide services to the police community in BC, these additional resources would likely provide the capacity to develop and support an interactive website to serve the public as well. Further, a 1-800 phone number has been considered in the past by the Centre and new resources should provide the capacity to finally implement this important service. As well, increased service could be provided to reportees who are having difficulty accessing information about their cases.

By acting in this supplementary “clearing house” role, the level of analysis conducted by the BCPMPC could be enhanced to provide essentially an “early warning system” for anomalous patterns of missing persons. The BCPMPC, with appropriate software, could provide regional analysis of missing persons data, which would augment the Centre’s examination of provincial trends. In this regard, the VPD has developed a data-mining system for extracting and conducting complex analysis on the information contained within the Police Records Information Management Environment (PRIME), the records management system used by all police agencies



There has been a tremendous amount of social apathy, including the perception of apathy by law enforcement across the country. And things like jurisdictional issues where a woman has gone missing in an urban setting and then is found in a rural setting.

ANGELA MACDOUGALL
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
BATTERED WOMEN’S SUPPORT SERVICES

in BC. The VPD’s Consolidated Records Intelligence Mining Environment (CRIME) system provides the capability to analyze multi-jurisdictional data from all three PRIME servers in the province. The Analysts are able to create complex queries to identify trends and quickly identify crime series in the early stages, such as predatory sex offences, using incident details and geo-spatial patterns with advanced software applications. This analysis capacity has evolved over several years and matured into a sophisticated system that has resulted in several notable successes and has been recognized as a best-practice.⁵⁶

Although PRIME is not used universally by police agencies in Canada, similar software could be used to data mine the appropriate police databases. This basic model could therefore likely be replicated in every province and formalized processes could be developed to provide for inter-provincial communication and cooperation, such as is already occurring to some extent between the RCMP in BC and Alberta, as described earlier.

National Clearing House with a 1-800 Phone Number

Thus far, Canadian agencies have not yet considered a national contact number with links to each province and territory. The improvements that have been suggested have largely focused on improving police coordination rather than public involvement and engagement. Despite the MC/MPUR initiative announced by Minister Ambrose in October 2010, no mention of a national 1-800 contact number has been made. Further, while the MC/MPUR project will have the capacity to take tips on its website, it is centered on local reporting of missing persons to the victim's (and in some cases the reportee's as well) police agency of jurisdiction. Thus, it is worthwhile to consider expanding the 1-800 program to a national level.

A national system has been implemented in Australia with some success. The Australia Federal Police operates a national website funded by the federal government devoted to, among other goals, reducing the incidence and impact of missing persons. While the national website doesn't include a 1-800 phone number, there are only seven state and territorial police services in Australia and each has a missing persons unit with their phone numbers and websites linked to the federal website. Australia is similar to Canada in several regards: it has a relatively small population (~22 million) in a very large country (the sixth largest in the world and more than three-quarters the area of Canada); it has a similar history of residential schools and failed assimilation of its Aboriginal population; and it has a federal police service. Its Aboriginal population has many similarities, despite the cultural differences, to those in Canada and research has shown that Aboriginal people in Canada and Australia face very similar challenges.

Based on what has been learned from experience in BC and elsewhere, and considering the very large number of police agencies in Canada, we propose that an additional component of the national MC/MPUR project be created that will focus on deployment of a new national "800 number" for reporting missing persons, tips, and related information. Such a service would augment the tip capabilities already being created on the NPSCMP public website.

Though the world is becoming a very Internet-based global community, it is important to recognize that many isolated (and often impoverished) communities lack reliable Internet access, and the depressed social environment in many of these communities is not supportive of incident reporting (or tip passing) via the Internet as the sole method of communication. If a small community does not have Internet access, then a website will be of no use whatsoever. Use of a contact phone number is necessary for those who do not have access to, are intimidated by, or are unaware of the public website. Cell phones have become very common and so a 1-800 number is often a more practical alternative.

This model already exists for other purposes, such as the National Child Exploitation Coordination Centre,⁵⁷ which has a mandate to be a centralized contact point for child exploitation files, ensuring that they are sent to the appropriate jurisdictional police agency for follow-up investigation. Further, the RCMP's "National Missing Children Services" includes the website "Our Missing Children,"⁵⁸ which features a toll-free phone number for inquiries (although it is currently intended for police use only). It may therefore be possible to utilize existing infrastructure to accommodate a national 1-800 phone number for missing Aboriginal women to complement the proposed national website. However accomplished, this would be an important addition to reduce barriers to reporting, assist police, and provide better service to the community.

CASE STUDY ► WHY WE MUST IMPROVE THE NATIONAL COORDINATION OF MISSING PERSONS INVESTIGATIONS

What exists today:

A 20-year-old Aboriginal woman leaves a reservation in northern Alberta. She tells her mother she is travelling to Vancouver, but might stop off in Prince George, BC. Her mother doesn't hear from her for one month. She visits the local police agency and files a police report with a young patrol officer. The case is not given any priority because:

- the incident did not occur in their jurisdiction of the police taking the missing persons report so it is not a priority;
- the local police do not have access to databases in Alberta and BC;
- the local police do not know which policing jurisdiction to contact to ask for further assistance and police in Prince George and Vancouver aren't aware she might have gone missing from one of their jurisdictions;
- the young police officer does not have any expertise in investigating missing persons cases; and
- the local police agency is not big enough to have a specialized missing persons unit.

What we need:

The mother of the missing northern Alberta woman phones the national toll-free phone number. She is asked for basic information to initiate a file and is instructed to visit her local police agency to file a report. The local police agency is familiar with the SisterWatch program and quickly assists the mother of the missing person, including offering culturally sensitive support to the family. Ideally, Victim Services personnel would have Aboriginal staff available, but at the least should be trained about and sensitive to Aboriginal cultural issues that may impact on the investigation. An investigator from the national or provincial centre contacts the local police agency and offers investigative assistance and advice including an offer to query various databases to determine if the missing person is accessing services. Initial queries show that the missing person is not accessing services and there is a determination that she may be the victim of foul play. If necessary, additional resources are offered to provincial or local missing persons units. An analyst in the national centre will also compare this new missing person report with other occurrences (including across provincial borders) to see if there is a trend. The national centre will further support the local police jurisdiction and may request that various police agencies (such as Prince George RCMP and Vancouver Police) conduct further inquiries. This same model could be replicated at the provincial level to create a network of provincial centres across Canada linked to the national centre. (There are many challenges to achieving such a conceptual model, and progress is being made, but gaps remain.)

THE SISTERWATCH PROJECT

COMMUNITY OUTREACH

One result of the problem of *missing* Aboriginal women is *murdered* Aboriginal women. Though police response is a significant piece of the puzzle, it is essential that efforts are put towards prevention. Communities and police need to work together to reduce the risk of victimization for women, find them quickly when they are missing (if they can be found), and finally, capture and incarcerate predators quickly so that they cannot continue to victimize.

By no means has this area been ignored at the local or national levels. The Government of Canada should be commended for its recognition of the importance of prevention efforts. In its announcement in October 2010, the Department of Justice committed to providing “\$1 million to support the development of school- and community-based pilot projects to help heal, move forward and provide alternatives to high-risk behaviour for young Aboriginal women, including young offenders.”⁵⁹

At the local level, the Vancouver Police Department implemented, in collaboration with a grassroots community organization called the Women’s Memorial March Committee, a program called “SisterWatch” in the fall of 2010.⁶⁰ SisterWatch came about because of the tragic September 2010 death of a young Aboriginal woman, Ashley Machiskinic, who fell from a window in the Downtown Eastside, leading many in the community to believe she had been murdered. Community activists occupied VPD offices demanding a meeting with the Chief Constable. A meeting with the Chief Constable occurred soon after, and as a result, a police/community partnership was born between the VPD and the “Women’s Memorial March Committee.” (The VPD originally called the program the “Guardian

The work we are doing [in SisterWatch] is ground breaking...We are moving forward despite the past and working towards lasting changes that will have ripple effects nationally. I am proud and happy to have the honor of working with all of you.

MONA WOODWARD
SPARKLING FAST RISING RIVER WOMAN
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
ABORIGINAL FRONT DOOR SOCIETY

Project.” Community committee members expressed concern that this raised the negative connotation of government guardianship and the residential school system and proposed the name SisterWatch. It was unanimously agreed the name should be changed.)

A SisterWatch committee, comprised of representatives from the VPD and the Women’s Memorial March Committee, oversees the program. Initiatives of SisterWatch include the installation of ruggedized “911-only” phones in Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside neighborhood; Town Hall meetings; a speakers’ bureau; a SisterWatch telephone tip line; a SisterWatch website; a reward for information about the death of Ashley Machiskinic; and several major proactive investigations targeting predators in the DTES that proved highly successful, resulting in numerous arrests and serious charges.

TARGETING PREDATORS

One of the first major investigations flowing from the SisterWatch project was “Project Rescue.” Residents of the Downtown Eastside raised concerns through community forums and the SisterWatch Committee about violent drug dealers who were preying on addicted marginalized women and engaging in extreme violence against them. Beat officers had heard about these crimes, but

The SisterWatch program is significant because the program was through collaboration with women from the community. The [SisterWatch] arrests were significant because...it seemed like the police were listening. And instead of arresting the victims of the oppression, they were now after the perpetrators.

LISA YELLOW-QUILL
BLUE THUNDERBIRD WOMAN/STRONG
MEDICINE WOMAN STANDING

CO-MANAGER ABORIGINAL WOMEN'S
PROGRAM/STV COUNSELLOR

BATTERED WOMEN'S SUPPORT SERVICES

most had not been reported. As a result of this information, in September 2010, a major proactive investigation was created – “Project Rescue” – involving detectives from the VPD’s Gangs/Drugs and Major Crimes Sections. The team employed undercover operations, surveillance, and wiretaps, among other investigative strategies. The first phase of the investigation resulted in 60 serious charges against 17 individuals. Further, the VPD laid rare “criminal organization” charges for the first time in its history. The majority of the accused were held in custody resulting in more confidence in the VPD, less fear, and more victims coming forward to report serious, predatory crimes. Subsequent phases of the investigation were equally successful with arrests now totaling approximately 60 accused with 130 charges. The effect was reduced violence against marginalized women and increased community confidence in the VPD.

Law enforcement is all we have. In most regions of Canada, law enforcement is failing...So we’ve come a long way now where we’re sitting at the same table and don’t feel that hostility and we’re working collaboratively.

ANGELA MACDOUGALL

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

BATTERED WOMEN'S SUPPORT SERVICES

SISTERWATCH TIP LINE

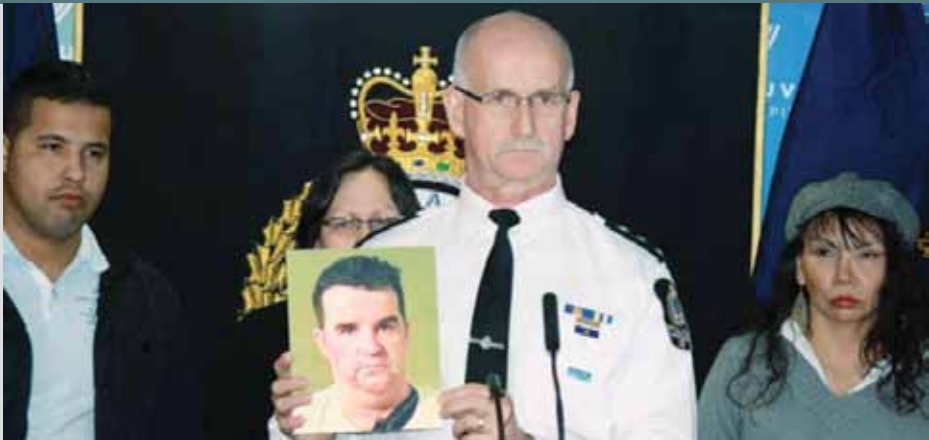
Another project of SisterWatch is a tip line. Initially it was to provide a mechanism to receive information about the death of Ashley Machiskinic, but it evolved into a service for women in the DTES to provide information about any non-emergency situations or crimes in the neighborhood, and also to seek assistance for challenges they are facing. Callers use a dedicated phone number and are connected with non-emergency police dispatch staff at “ECOMM” (the regional 911 centre) who have been specially trained to respond to calls to the SisterWatch line. The SisterWatch phones have also been used by parties wanting to report assaults on other women (who may be too afraid to make a report themselves), or by anyone wishing to provide information on victimizers in a completely safe, anonymous manner. Information collected through the tip line is relayed to the appropriate VPD unit and/or community service agency. Dedicated police staff vet any information received and correlate it with information from other sources to ensure that no case “falls through the cracks.”

DOWNTOWN EASTSIDE 911-ONLY PHONES



The community raised the concern that most pay phones had been removed from the Downtown Eastside (because of frequent malicious damage and their use by drug dealers). The VPD responded by having several strategically-placed “911-only” “ruggedized” telephones in this at-risk neighbourhood. The special telephones

CASE STUDY ► MARTIN TREMBLAY



At the SisterWatch meetings, the community raised concerns about a male from outside the Downtown Eastside who they believed was preying on young Aboriginal girls. After hearing community concerns, Tremblay was targeted in Project Rescue and was arrested for drug trafficking. When told about the charges, community members attended the bail hearing to support the prosecutor. The judge denied Tremblay bail, and he subsequently pleaded guilty and received an unusually high 12-month sentence for trafficking. As soon as he was sentenced, VPD Inspector Dean Robinson asked for victims and witnesses to come forward:

We don't usually tell you about a person's extensive criminal record or that we suspect their involvement in many unsolved crimes but this time is different. We believe that the danger and damage being done to vulnerable women and, in particular, young Aboriginal women, in the Downtown Eastside is so prevalent that we need to take extraordinary measures to safeguard the women who are at risk. As a result of SisterWatch, Martin Tremblay has been charged with four counts of trafficking cocaine and one charge of possession of cocaine for the purposes of trafficking. He is currently in jail. He's a convicted sex offender who in 2002 was found guilty of five counts of sexual assault. In those cases he used alcohol and drugs to lure and incapacitate his victims.

We know the community is very concerned about this criminal. Even though he is in

TIMOTHY BEITH CASE STUDY

A community member brought concerns about a sexual predator preying on marginalized and addicted Aboriginal to a patrol member. She worked tirelessly to confirm the information and then brought it to the SisterWatch investigative team which took over the investigation. As a result, Timothy Beith, 59, was arrested and charged with two counts of sexual assault and two counts of voyeurism. A SisterWatch committee member remarked, "To me, this is a great example of what we can accomplish together to make the community safer for women."

jail now, we believe the only way we can guarantee that he won't harm more women is if he stays in jail. In order for that to happen, we are taking this extraordinary measure of putting out his picture in hopes that other people who can give us information that will help our investigation will be able to recognize him and come forward. We are interested in hearing from anyone who has information about this man. We have resources available to offer support and reassurance to those who call or come forward. He is in jail now and can't hurt you.



deployed for this project were purchased by the VPD from a company in California and installed at VPD expense. As is the case for all 911 calls in the region, response dispatch staff are located at the regional 911 emergency services facility, “ECOMM,” so no additional costs were incurred. The hardware was a one-time only expense that the VPD could absorb, provided a needed service, and showed the VPD’s commitment to responding to community concerns, which is important to build confidence in the community with the police.

The Importance of Collaboration

As noted earlier, the relationships between the community and the police are integral to the success of investigations. If women don’t trust the police to properly investigate acts of violence against them, then reporting and cooperation by victims and witnesses will suffer. This will embolden the perpetrators and, overall, the women in the community will be less safe. This collaborative approach involving the police and the community is achieving far more than would be possible with unilateral efforts.

To reduce violence against Aboriginal women and respond better when they go

“VIVIAN HOUSE” CASE STUDY

A support worker called the SisterWatch tip line regarding a resident of Vivian House who had been assaulted. The reportee feared for the victim’s safety since she suffers from serious health issues, making it difficult to protect herself. Her drug addiction and involvement in the survival sex trade added to her vulnerability. The tip was forwarded to the SisterWatch investigative team for follow-up. The victim was reluctant to cooperate with police; however, that did not deter investigators from taking steps to interview a possible suspect and ensure that safety measures were in place at Vivian House to support and protect her.

The support worker was extremely pleased with the efforts of the investigators: “...the work you did to help protect [the victim] was really meaningful. There was no arrest, no case, no glory. Just really good work. This type of police work lets predators know that vulnerable people in this community are being watched over and that they can’t get away with murder. I want to thank you myself and extend the thanks of many women in the community for doing what you did.”

missing, the police must always strive to have positive relationships with marginalized communities. SisterWatch is one example of the VPD’s commitment to this goal, as are the assignment of police officers in Native Liaison, Sex Industry Liaison and Homeless Coordinator positions. There has been broad acknowledgement of the positive results of the VPD’s efforts to improve relationships with the DTES community, and in particular with Aboriginal women, and the program is now being expanded to serve marginalized women who live in other areas of Vancouver. This model could be used as a template for other police agencies facing similar challenges.

CONCLUSION

Aboriginal people in Canada face many challenges that are the product of complex social, economic and cultural factors. One of the most troubling manifestations of this situation is that Aboriginal women go missing and are murdered at a rate highly disproportionate to their population. Further, marginalized Aboriginal women, especially those working in the sex trade, have been prey in several provinces for known or suspected serial killers. This tragic situation demands a broad and multi-pronged response. More resources focused on prevention are required to reduce the risk created by the marginalization of Aboriginal women that makes them easy prey for offenders. Further, there must be an improved police response to reports of missing Aboriginal women to overcome the many challenges found in these investigations.

Commendably, much has been done in recent years. The RCMP, both provincially and nationally, have made significant contributions to improving the response to missing and murdered women in Canada, as have other police agencies and associations. Initiatives include well-resourced task forces, improved information sharing and coordination between police jurisdictions, and the development of specialized resources and improved policies. In addition, the continuing development of a national Missing Persons and Unidentified Remains project, which will include a tip website and sophisticated information analysis, is well underway. The federal government has committed to significant new resources to fund this initiative and complementary resources to support improved police investigations and to engage in increased prevention at the community level.

There remains, however, more to do.

Experience has shown that a variety of barriers to reporting and successful investigations still exist, but some of them can be remedied with relatively small allocations of resources.

First, a “clearing house” model with 1-800 phone numbers at the provincial and national levels would make it easier to report missing persons, especially for those in underprivileged communities without Internet access. It would also allow police to correlate information; improve information exchange between jurisdictions; and provide better service to the community. This model could likely be handled within existing provincial and national infrastructure at a relatively small incremental cost.

The SisterWatch tip line is an example of how a creative solution was reached at minimal cost by using existing infrastructure, since the capacity to answer the SisterWatch tip line already existed at ECOMM (the emergency 911 centre) and staff only required some additional training. Likewise, national and provincial 1-800 phone numbers could likely be absorbed into existing infrastructure.

Second, there needs to be harmonized legislation across Canada to provide a mechanism for police to quickly access various provincial and national non-police databases such as health and welfare records that are important to successful investigations.

Third, improved relationships between police and Aboriginal communities – particularly in urban centres – must remain a priority. More confidence in the police means improved reporting of violence against Aboriginal

women, more witnesses coming forward and more rapid reporting to police when Aboriginal women go missing or are victimized. Further, collaboration with affected communities can produce valuable suspect information allowing police to focus investigations on those predators who target Aboriginal women. The SisterWatch Program, a collaboration between the Vancouver Police Department and the Women’s Memorial March Committee, has made significant progress in this regard, and may be a model helpful to other communities.

SisterWatch is really a forward thinking initiative that can have great benefits for the future. It is ground breaking and I think people have to understand the fact that the regular meetings are a safe place to express frustrations, praise, hopes and fears is really important. While it is a collaboration, it is not a place where we all join to pat each other on the backs...but a place where there are difficult conversations...As in any other arena, this serves to build relationships...and opens doors to further collaboration. I think it’s an example that could be followed by all kinds of police forces.

KATE GIBSON
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
WISH DROP-IN CENTRE SOCIETY

RECOMMENDATIONS

There have been several excellent reports written in Canada on the issue of missing and murdered Aboriginal women resulting in numerous recommendations. These reports include the Amnesty International reports “Stolen Sisters” report from 2004, and the follow-up report “No More Stolen Sisters” from 2009;⁶¹ the “Coordinating Committee of Senior Officials Missing Women Working Group’s Report;”⁶² and the “Final Report of the Provincial Partnership Committee on Missing Persons in Saskatchewan.”⁶³ Each of these reports have made very worthy recommendations, some of which have been described in this report and are reflected in recommendations 1 through 6 below. Recommendations 7 to 9 are recommendations offered by the joint Vancouver Police and Women’s Memorial March SisterWatch Committee based on recent experiences and discussions.

Summary of key existing recommendations:

1. To know the size and nature of the problem and so that resources can be effectively targeted, reliable and comprehensive statistics must be gathered. This starts with police agencies but must end with aggregation and analysis at the local, provincial and national level. A harmonized data collection scheme should be developed to accomplish this goal.
2. Police forces across Canada should implement best-practice protocols for responding to reports of missing Aboriginal women. There need to be standardized protocols for police handling of missing persons cases



including tools for fair and effective assessment of the risk to the missing individual.

3. There should be improved co-ordination of police investigations into long-term missing persons cases and unsolved murders involving Aboriginal women and other women at risk.
4. Police forces should provide specialized staffing to review and coordinate responses to missing persons cases.
5. Police should work closely with Aboriginal women's organizations and other front line groups to identify and implement appropriate and effective protocols for action on missing persons cases, with a view to developing standards for police response in keeping with the risks to Aboriginal women and girls.
6. Prevention is key to reducing victimization. There need to be more resources targeted at assisting Aboriginal women and girls to escape from dangerous circumstances, whether it involves specific circumstances such as violent domestic situations or the sex trade, or the more general danger created by poverty and addiction that results in marginalization.

New SisterWatch Committee Recommendations:

7. There should be a national 1-800 phone number in support of the MC/MPUR website and a "clearing house/centre for excellence" model that serves both the public and police agencies. There must be effective coordination with the provinces to ensure no case falls between the cracks.
8. Every province should have a 1-800 phone number and a missing persons website as part of a "clearing house/centre for excellence model" as described above. At the provincial level, in addition to supporting police agencies, there must be emphasis on ensuring reporting missing persons is simple and low-barrier, and that no report is missed or mishandled because of a lack of communication and/or coordination between jurisdictions.
9. There should be harmonized legislation in all provinces and territories, such as recently passed in Alberta, to provide rapid police access to government databases (e.g., health and social assistance) that would be useful in missing persons investigations.
10. Other police agencies facing similar challenges to Vancouver should consider using the SisterWatch program as a model for community collaboration and targeting of those engaged in predatory violence against marginalized Aboriginal women.

APPENDIX "A"

ORGANIZATION	DESCRIPTION OF INITIATIVES
CANADIAN ASSOCIATION OF CHIEFS OF POLICE (CACP)	<p>In 2006, the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police passed a resolution recommending that all police services in Canada consider adopting the principles incorporated in the Ontario Provincial Police Lost/Missing Persons Manual specifically with respect to Aboriginal and marginalized people.⁶⁴ The resolution noted that the OPP had produced a "comprehensive and holistic policy manual for dealing with lost/missing persons cases that, with regard to Aboriginal and marginalized people, is based on principles of cultural sensitivity, respect, compassion and empathy." It is unknown to what extent the resolution has been implemented in police agencies across Canada.</p>
THE FEDERAL/ PROVINCIAL/ TERRITORIAL MISSING WOMEN WORKING GROUP	<p>The BC and Alberta governments proposed a working group of federal, provincial and territorial deputy justice ministers in 2006 to examine issues associated with missing and murdered women in Canada. The goal of the working group was to determine the "extent it is possible to prevent serial sexual predation of women by identifying who is at risk of victimization or offending."⁶⁵ In September 2010, the working group produced a "condensed" report⁶⁶ and noted it would be producing its full report to federal, provincial and territorial deputy justice ministers in 2011.</p>
MISSING CHILDREN/MISSING PERSONS AND UNIDENTIFIED REMAINS PROJECT (MC/MPUR)	<p>Since 2008, a joint initiative between the CACP, the RCMP, and victims' advocacy groups to better collect and disseminate information on missing persons and unidentified human remains has grown into a well-funded project to address the problem. Concrete steps have been taken to better capture data on missing persons in CPIC, and to better communicate details of these incidents to provincial, regional, and local police forces.</p>
ALBERTA MISSING PERSONS AND UNIDENTIFIED HUMAN REMAINS JOINT PROJECT	<p>In Alberta, all police agencies and the Chief Medical Examiner have a joint website for Alberta Missing Persons and Unidentified Human Remains. Each police agency is responsible for providing information about its missing persons cases for the website, and staff can be contacted by email and by phone.⁶⁷ According to their website, the RCMP in Alberta began a pilot project with the RCMP in BC that has emphasized the benefits of participation by multiple jurisdictions. Discussions are being held with stakeholders in Saskatchewan and Manitoba with an objective of a "regional program/database" and website that will allow the public access to materials and information relating to Western Canadian missing person files. The project envisioned a national website, and noted the importance of protocols across police jurisdictions at the regional, provincial and national levels to provide for a consistent response.</p>

BC POLICE MISSING PERSON CENTRE (BCPMPC)

In British Columbia, in 2005, with the support of the BC Association of Chiefs of Police, the RCMP created the British Columbia Police Missing Persons Centre (BCPMPC). This is an integrated unit within the RCMP E Division Major Crime Section and is comprised of both RCMP and municipal police resources. There are currently three police positions: two RCMP investigators and one municipal police service investigator. The BCPMPC is committed to the interests of all police agencies in BC. The mandate of the Unit is to provide guidance and support to investigators during the course of missing persons investigations, and it is also responsible for provincial missing persons policy development and oversight of the provincial AMBER Alert program. The BCPMPC monitors and reviews current missing persons investigations, particularly those that are identified as high risk in nature. The Unit also responds to daily requests for assistance and guidance, conducts historical file reviews upon request, and provides training for missing persons investigations. The BCPMPC is an active participant in the Canadian strategy on Missing Persons and Unidentified Human Remains.⁶⁸

BC CORONER’S OFFICE

The BC Coroner’s Service has a website for those seeking information about unidentified human remains and has a toll-free phone number. They can also be contacted by email. However, they do not have any information on missing persons.⁶⁹

MANITOBA ASSOCIATION OF CHIEFS OF POLICE

The Manitoba Association of Chiefs of Police has a website with a missing persons portion.⁷⁰ There are multiple participating police agencies from Manitoba, including RCMP, municipal and Aboriginal police agencies and the Military Police that participate in this project. The site has a search capability for cases in its database. This site is maintained by the RCMP in Manitoba for “Project Disappear,” Manitoba’s Missing Persons/Cold Case project.

SASKATCHEWAN ASSOCIATION OF CHIEFS OF POLICE

The Saskatchewan Association of Chiefs of Police created a website which provides analysis of missing persons from 1940 to 2009 with race, gender and geographic location.⁷¹ The website also provides detailed statistics on missing persons.

ONTARIO PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT

Ontario and the Provincial Coroner have a joint website for their Missing Persons and Unidentified Bodies Unit.⁷² Citizens can provide information by email or they can phone a manned telephone line during business hours (with voice mail after business hours).⁷³

MUNICIPAL AGENCIES

Many municipal and regional police agencies in Canada have missing person’s websites, including the Halifax Regional Police;⁷⁴ the Ottawa Police Service;⁷⁵ the Peel Regional Police;⁷⁶ the Prince Albert Police Service;⁷⁷ the Regina Police Service;⁷⁸ the Saskatoon Police Service;⁷⁹ and the Vancouver Police Department.⁸⁰ Generally these sites contain information regarding current missing person cases with photographs, directions on how to make a report, contact information, links to other sites, and so on.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ Amnesty International, *Canada: Stolen Sisters – A human rights response to violence and discrimination against Indigenous women*, AI Index AMR 20/003/2004, October 4, 2004, available at www.amnesty.ca/stolensisters/amr2000304.pdf.
- ² These reports are available at <http://www.amnesty.ca/stolensisters/amr2000304.pdf> and www.amnesty.ca/amnestynews/upload/AMR200122009.pdf, respectively.
- ³ The Women's Memorial March came about as a result of a horrific January 1992 murder in Vancouver. The women in the community were mobilized into action and out of this sense of hopelessness, frustration, outrage and feeling like no one was listening to them about the increasing violence against women in the downtown eastside, they organized a march through the streets with the names and sometimes photographs of women in the community who had died or were murdered. Each year on February 14, women (and men) take to the streets to bring attention to those women who have been murdered or gone missing. The march aims to emphasize the work that is yet to be done to prevent and end violence against women in the downtown eastside. The Women's Memorial March Committee exists to organize this event, and to do advocacy work on related issues.
- ⁴ www12.statcan.ca/census-recensement/2006/as-sa/97-558/pdf/97-558-XIE2006001.pdf
- ⁵ Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP), 1996, downloaded April 26, 2011 from www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/webarchives/20071115053257/www.ainc-inac.gc.ca/ch/rcap/sg/sgmm_e.html.
- ⁶ Statistics Canada. Inuit, Metis and First Nations, 2006 Census Findings, downloaded April 26, 2011 from <http://www12.statcan.ca/census-recensement/2006/as-sa/97-558/index-eng.cfm>, p. 6. Also see www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fniah-spnia/alt_formats/fnihb-dgspni/pdf/pubs/aborig-autoch/2009-stats-profil-eng.pdf.
- ⁷ Jodi-Anne Brzozowski, Andrea Taylor-Butts and Sara Johnson, "Victimization and offending among the Aboriginal population in Canada", *Juristat*. Vol. 26, no. 3, Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, 2006. Downloaded April 26, 2007 from www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/85-002-x/85-002-x2006003-eng.pdf, p. 3.
- ⁸ Health Canada. A Statistical Profile on the Health of First Nations in Canada – Self-rated Health and Selected Conditions, 2002 to 2005, downloaded from www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fniah-spnia/alt_formats/pdf/pubs/aborig-autoch/2009-stats-profil-vol3/2009-stats-profil-vol3-eng.pdf.
- ⁹ See, for example, www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fniah-spnia/alt_formats/fnihb-dgspni/pdf/pubs/aborig-autoch/2009-stats-profil-eng.pdf.
- ¹⁰ Ibid, note 7, p. 6.
- ¹¹ See, for example, www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fniah-spnia/promotion/suicide/index-eng.php, www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fniah-spnia/promotion/mental/index-eng.php and www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fniah-spnia/pubs/promotion/_suicide/prev_youth-jeunes/section2-eng.php#s212.
- ¹² Ibid, note 7, p. 13.
- ¹³ Ibid, p. 9.
- ¹⁴ See, for example, www.cbc.ca/news/canada/story/2008/05/16/f-faqs-residential-schools.html, downloaded April 27, 2011.
- ¹⁵ See www.cbc.ca/news/canada/story/2008/06/11/pm-statement.html, downloaded April 27, 2011.
- ¹⁶ Aboriginal Women: A Demographic, Social and Economic Profile, Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, Summer 1996. Downloaded on April 26, 2011 from www.ainc-inac.gc.ca/ai/rs/pubs/sts/awp/awp-eng.asp.
- ¹⁷ Ibid, note 7, and Samuel Perreault (2011) *Violent victimization of Aboriginal people in the Canadian provinces, 2009*, Juristat Article, Statistics Canada, catalogue no. 85-002-X. Available at www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/85-002-x/2011001/article/11415-eng.pdf.

- ¹⁸ It is difficult to know how many Aboriginal women and girls have been murdered or are missing in Canada. In 2005, the United Nations Human Rights Committee asked the federal government to provide statistics on this issue, but the government was apparently unable to do so. There are several reasons for the lack of data, but a significant one is the reluctance of police agencies to collect data on the race of victims; police have been criticized in the past for “racist” policies and not having a bona fide need for this information pursuant to protection of privacy legislation.
- ¹⁹ From the 2004 Stolen Sisters report, citing: PACE Society, *Violence against Women in the Vancouver’s Street Level Sex Trade and the Police Response*, Vancouver, 2000, p. 82, pp. 32-3, p. 6.
- ²⁰ Vancouver Police Department, “Missing Women Investigation Review,” September 2010, p. 54. Available at vancouver.ca/police/media/2010/MWInvestigationReview_final2.pdf.
- ²¹ Doreen Duchesne (1997). *Street Prostitution in Canada*. Juristat Vol. 17, no. 2, Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, Statistics Canada, pp. 8-9.
- ²² John Lowman & L. Fraser (1995). *Violence against persons who prostitute: The experience in British Columbia*. Ottawa: Department of Justice.
- ²³ Jonathan Dudek (2001). *When Silenced Voices Speak: An Exploratory Study of Prostitute Homicide*, Doctoral dissertation, MCP Hahnemann University, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, p. 389.
- ²⁴ Lindsay Kines and David Hogben, “20 outstanding files: A group of prostitutes is convinced a serial killer is responsible for disappearances in Vancouver, but the police disagree,” *National Post Online*, March 3, 1999. (Binder 3, Tab 85.)
- ²⁵ Ibid, note 20.
- ²⁶ The video-recording of this apology is available at vancouver.ca/police/assets/pdf/pickton-decision-leopard-statement.pdf.
- ²⁷ See vancouver.ca/police/assets/pdf/lessons-learned-mw-investigation.pdf.
- ²⁸ See, for example, Lori Culbert, “Lost, Not Forgotten – After a scathing audit, investigators who track down the missing are winning accolades” in the *Vancouver Sun*, December 2, 2006, available at www.missingpeople.net/lost_not_forgotten.htm) and Stephanie Levitz, “Lessons from tragedy: how Vancouver’s missing women changed police,” *Canadian Press*, January 7, 2007, available at www.missingpeople.net/lessons_from_tragedy.htm
- ²⁹ Coordinating Committee of Senior Officials Missing Women Working Group Report: “Issues Related to the High Number of Murdered and Missing Women in Canada,” September 2010, p. 8 (available at www.scics.gc.ca/CMFiles/830992005_e1MAJ-2112011-6827.pdf).
- ³⁰ www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/85-002-x/85-002-x1998002-eng.pdf
- ³¹ Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness Canada, DNA Missing Persons Index (MPI), A Public Consultation Paper, March 2005, available at www.ulcc.ca/en/poam2/DNA_Missing_Persons_Index_CP_En.pdf
- ³² Final Report of the Provincial Partnership Committee on Missing Persons, October 2007, p. 19, www.justice.gov.sk.ca/adx/asp/adxGetMedia.aspx?DocID=3025,104,81,1,Documents&MediaID=1615&Filename=missing-persons-final.pdf
- ³³ Native Women’s Association of Canada. “What Their Stories Tell Us – Research findings from the Sisters in Spirit initiative”, 2010. Available at www.nwac.ca/sites/default/files/imce/2010_NWAC_SIS_Report_EN.pdf.
- ³⁴ Coordinating Committee of Senior Officials Missing Women Working Group Report: “Issues Related to the High Number of Murdered and Missing Women in Canada,” September 2010, p. 3 (available at www.scics.gc.ca/CMFiles/830992005_e1MAJ-2112011-6827.pdf)
- ³⁵ Ibid, note 33, p. ii.
- ³⁶ Ibid, note 33, p. 25.

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- ³⁹ www.justice.gc.ca/eng/news-nouv/nr-cp/2010/doc_32564.html.
- ⁴⁰ www.fns.bc.ca/pdf/ACTFMissingWomenFactSheet_02_2010.pdf, downloaded April 27, 2011.
- ⁴¹ Information regarding EPANA provided by Superintendent Jim Gresham, the Officer in Charge of the RCMP's E-Division Major Crime Section, in email correspondence on May 14, 2011.
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- ⁴⁵ Indian and Northern Affairs Canada. "Aboriginal Women: A Profile from the 1996 Census", December 2001, p. 7-2. Downloaded on April 26, 2011 from www.ainc-inac.gc.ca/ai/rs/pubs/sts/awp/awp-eng.asp.
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- ⁴⁷ For example, both the E-Division RCMP and the Vancouver Police Department's policies. E-Division have such a requirement.
- ⁴⁸ See, for example, the Coordinating Committee of Senior Officials Missing Women Working Group Report: "Issues Related to the High Number of Murdered and Missing Women in Canada," September 2010, p. 13 (available at www.scics.gc.ca/CMFiles/830992005_e1MAJ-2112011-6827.pdf) and the Final Report of the Provincial Partnership Committee on Missing Persons, October 2007, p. 7, available at www.justice.gov.sk.ca/adx/adx/adxGetMedia.aspx?DocID=3025,104,81,1,Documents&MediaID=1615&Filename=missing-persons-final.pdf.
- ⁴⁹ www.aacp.ca/publicdocs/Resolution%2010-05%20Missing%20Person%20Legislation.pdf.
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- ⁵² Ibid, p. 11.
- ⁵³ For a further description of the problem, see pp. 243-245 in the Vancouver Police Department's "Missing Women Investigation Review," published September 2010 and available at vancouver.ca/police/media/2010/MWInvestigationReview_final2.pdf.
- ⁵⁴ vancouver.ca/ctyclerk/cclerk/021128/rr1.htm
- ⁵⁵ www2.parl.gc.ca/HousePublications/Publication.aspx?DocId=1721695&Language=E
- ⁵⁶ In May 2010, Special Constable Ryan Prox of the Vancouver Police Department received the International Association of Law Enforcement Intelligence Analysts (IALEIA) Award of Excellence for both his roles in the development and implementation of the CRIME system to address technological, business model and analytical shortcomings that are commonly seen in police organizations. His nomination was supported by Mr. Alan Castle, Director, Criminal Analysis, Pacific Region RCMP.
- ⁵⁷ www.rcmp-grc.gc.ca/ncecc-cncee/index-accueil-eng.htm
- ⁵⁸ www.rcmp-grc.gc.ca/omc-ned/contact-persress-eng.htm
- ⁵⁹ www.justice.gc.ca/eng/news-nouv/nr-cp/2010/doc_32564.html.

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- ⁶² Ibid, note 25.
- ⁶³ Ibid, note 28.
- ⁶⁴ Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police, Resolution #07-2006: Missing Persons Investigations Policies downloaded April 27, 2011 from www.cacp.ca/media/resolutions/efiles/38/PackageAdopted.pdf.
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- ⁶⁸ From email correspondence with Superintendent Jim Gresham, the Officer in Charge of the RCMP's E-Division Major Crime Section, April 21, 2011.
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- ⁷⁰ www.macp.mb.ca/disappear.php
- ⁷¹ www.sacp.ca/missing/index.php
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- ⁷⁸ www.reginapolice.ca/missingpersons.php
- ⁷⁹ police.saskatoon.sk.ca/index.php?loc=photos/missing.php
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VANCOUVER POLICE DEPARTMENT
Beyond the Call



THE THUNDERBIRD

The land on which the City of Vancouver is established has been the territory of the Coast Salish peoples for thousands of years. Over the last century-and-a-half others have come and built their homes and businesses on this land. This was done without a treaty or ceding of land by the Coast Salish. Today we share their land as the treaty process moves forward.

The Vancouver Police acknowledge the traditional ownership of this land and the history of colonization through displaying the Coast Salish thunderbird motif on marked police cars. This display is a statement of mutual respect and friendship.

The artwork by artist Susan Point is a gift from the Musqueam Band. It was presented to the Vancouver Police in a ceremony on National Aboriginal Day, June 21, 2006.

In Coast Salish lore, the thunderbird is a majestic supernatural creature. He has a huge curved beak and three tail feathers, representing change from past to present and then into the future. The thunderbird is a guardian spirit acting on behalf of those weaker. He is greatly respected as the hero in many legends of the Coast Salish. The thunderbird symbolizes strength, principle and courage. He is also a link to the spirit world of the creator.

The artist, Susan Point, states of the thunderbird, "Thunderbird, living high in the mountains, was the most powerful of all spirits. When the thunderbird flaps his wings, thunder crashes and lightning flashes from his eyes. The thunderbird is a protective figure, representing protection for the members of the Vancouver Police Force, and the protection that they offer to the citizens of Vancouver. The crescent behind the ear represents a watchful eye."

Proudly displayed on Vancouver police cars, the thunderbird inspires security and harmony for all those today who are on these traditional lands.



VANCOUVER POLICE DEPARTMENT

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