

MISSINGWOMEN

INVESTIGATION REVIEW

SUMMARY REPORT

DOUG LEFARD – DEPUTY CHIEF CONSTABLE
AUGUST 2010



VANCOUVER POLICE DEPARTMENT
Beyond the Call

© Vancouver Police Department, 2010.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced in any form by any photographic, electronic, mechanical or other means, or used in any information storage and retrieval system without the express written permission of the copyright holder except in accordance with the provisions of the Copyright Act. Applications for the copyright holder's written permission to reproduce any part of this publication should be addressed to the Vancouver Police Department, Information Management Section.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

KEY FINDINGS OF REPORT	4
PART I: THE MISSING WOMEN INVESTIGATION 1997 TO FEBRUARY 2002	6
INTRODUCTION	6
1997/1998	6
1999	8
2000	12
2001	14
2002	16
PART II: ANALYSIS OF THE MISSING WOMEN INVESTIGATION	18
INTRODUCTION	18
THE VPD'S LACK OF COMMITMENT TO THE SERIAL KILLER THEORY	19
BIAS AGAINST SEX TRADE WORKERS	20
THE IMPACT OF RESOURCE SHORTAGES ON THE MISSING WOMEN INVESTIGATION	21
THE NEED FOR A MULTI-JURISDICIAL INVESTIGATION	21
HOW THE VPD INVESTIGATION COULD HAVE BEEN IMPROVED	22
THE PICKTON INVESTIGATION PRIOR TO THE FEBRUARY 2002 SEARCH WARRANTS	24
CONCLUSION	27
RECOMMENDATIONS	28
EPILOGUE	29

KEY FINDINGS OF REPORT

This Summary Report is a condensed version of a much more comprehensive report (“the Review”). The Review provides a chronology of events and a critical analysis of the investigation into the then unexplained disappearances of numerous sex trade workers, the majority of whom were associated with the Downtown Eastside of Vancouver.

We now know that many of the Missing Women fell prey to a serial killer. It should be noted at the outset that while it is clear today who the serial killer was, that is with the benefit of hindsight. Even when a fully functioning multi-jurisdictional team of highly competent and experienced investigators was assembled and had the capacity to review all available information, it still didn’t identify Pickton as a priority suspect and the case broke because of serendipitous circumstances. As well, two other serial murder cases in BC remain unresolved, despite extraordinary investigative efforts; clearly the challenges of a serial killer investigation are immense.

The disappearances of the Missing Women began in the mid-1990s and ended when Robert Pickton was arrested in February 2002. The Review examines the general failures occurring in the Vancouver Police Department investigation, and also the specific failures occurring in the Coquitlam RCMP investigation after they received information and evidence in 1998 and 1999 that directly linked Pickton to homicides of sex trade workers. The Review concludes with recommendations that, if implemented, would correct problems and minimize the probability of such problems from occurring again. Some of these deficiencies have been corrected since they were first identified in 2004, but there are others beyond the control of the VPD that have not been satisfactorily addressed.

The Review determined the following:

1. The VPD should have recognized earlier that there was a serial killer at work and responded appropriately, but the investigation was plagued by a failure at the VPD’s management level to recognize what it was faced with.
2. When the VPD did respond with an investigative unit targeted at investigating the Missing Women as potential serial murders, the investigative team suffered from a lack of resources, poor continuity of staffing, multi-jurisdictional challenges, a lack of training, and a lack of leadership, among other challenges.
3. There was compelling information received and developed by the VPD and the RCMP from August 1998 to late 1999 suggesting that Pickton was the likely killer, and it was sufficient to justify a sustained and intensive investigation. The VPD received the first information about Pickton in July and August 1998, and also received extraordinary information from an unrelated informant in 1999. The information suggested that Downtown Eastside sex trade workers were willingly visiting the Pickton property in Coquitlam and some were being murdered there.
4. The VPD passed on ALL information about Pickton to the RCMP when it received it, because the RCMP had jurisdiction over the investigation of information pertaining to crimes occurring in Coquitlam.

5. The RCMP accepted responsibility for investigating the Pickton information and led an investigation in Coquitlam. This investigation was intensely pursued until mid-1999, but was thereafter essentially abandoned by the RCMP, although the RCMP continued to explicitly assert authority over the investigation. RCMP management appears to have not understood the significance of the evidence they had in 1999 pointing to Pickton, and did not ensure it was collated in such a way as to allow a proper analysis.
6. Notwithstanding the many deficiencies in the VPD investigation, they did not cause the failure of the investigation into Pickton because the RCMP had responsibility for that investigation while the VPD focused on other investigative avenues. If the VPD investigation had been better managed, however, the VPD could have brought more pressure to bear on the RCMP to pursue the Pickton investigation more vigorously.
7. There have been significant improvements in the VPD as a result of the lessons learned from the Missing Women investigation, including better training, analysis, resources, and leadership. There have also been significant improvements in the response to multi-jurisdictional crimes by the VPD, the RCMP, and other police agencies in BC, but other improvements are needed.
8. Had there been a regional police force in the Lower Mainland at the time of the Pickton investigation, the problems created by the multiple policing jurisdictions would have been significantly reduced and a better outcome likely would have resulted – there would have only been one set of organizational priorities.¹

¹ It is notable that, notwithstanding opposition to a regional force, the RCMP in the Lower Mainland are now organized on a regional basis, with an Assistant Commissioner as the “Chief” of all the Lower Mainland RCMP detachments and their Officers in Charge reporting to him. But because of the mix of RCMP and independent police services in the Lower Mainland, there is no one in charge and accountable overall.

PART I: THE MISSING WOMEN INVESTIGATION 1997 TO FEBRUARY 2002

INTRODUCTION

The Downtown Eastside of Vancouver is reportedly the poorest neighborhood in Canada, and is home to a highly-marginalized population plagued by substance abuse. “Survival” sex trade workers are among its most vulnerable residents, and live under constant threat of violence and disease.

In 1997, sex trade workers began to go missing at a rate far higher than the low historical patterns. In 1998, Detective Constable Lori Shenher was assigned to find out what had happened to these “Missing Women”, with the expectation that they could be located, as had happened in the past. Detective Constable Shenher made extraordinary efforts to find the Missing Women, but was unsuccessful, and the circumstances suggested a serial killer was responsible. An investigative team was created in 1999, but without bodies, witnesses, or other evidence, it faced immense challenges. It nevertheless identified Pickton as a prime suspect, but that investigation and others were frustrated by the multi-jurisdictional aspect of the investigation, and other organizational and operational obstacles, which are the subject of analysis in Part II of this Review.

1997/1998

In February 1997, a First Nations group provided to police a list of 55 women from the Downtown Eastside alleged to be missing or murdered. When police records were consulted, the list swelled to 71. Constable Dave Dickson, well known in the Downtown Eastside, was loaned to the Provincial Unsolved Homicide Unit to investigate this list. Within weeks, he was able to account for all but two of the 71 women.

But also in early 1997, other sex trade workers began to be reported missing from the Downtown Eastside who could not be found. By the end of the year, nine such women had been reported missing, and this pattern continued into 1998. When one young sex trade worker, Sarah de Vries, went missing in April 1998, her friend and former client Wayne Leng became a vocal advocate for an investigation and a reward, as did Sarah’s sister, Maggie de Vries.



The lack of a systemized method for determining anomalous patterns of missing person reports delayed recognition of the size of the problem, but by early 1998, it was recognized in both the Downtown Eastside community and the VPD that something was amiss. As a result, in July 1998, Detective Constable Lori Shenher was added to the VPD’s Missing Persons Unit to focus on finding the Missing Women. Her supervisor was Sergeant Geramy Field of the Homicide Unit.

In July and August 1998, two tips were provided to the VPD with second-hand information suggesting Robert “Willy” Pickton was responsible for killing Sarah de Vries at his Coquitlam pig farm, and might be responsible for the rest of the Missing Women. William Hiscox was identified as the source of the tips, and he also provided similar information to Wayne Leng.

At around the same time, Inspector Gary Greer, who was in charge of the Downtown Eastside, and Detective Inspector Kim Rossmo, the VPD’s “geographic profiler,” formed a “Working Group” to examine the Missing Women issue and determine if a serial killer might be at work.

On August 18th, 1998, Detective Constable Shenher met with Corporal Mike Connor of the Coquitlam RCMP, a highly experienced investigator who had charged Pickton in 1997 with an almost fatal knife assault at his pig farm on [REDACTED] a sex trade worker from the Downtown Eastside (a charge that was eventually stayed). Since the information from Hiscox related to an alleged crime in the Coquitlam RCMP’s jurisdiction, Corporal Connor took responsibility for initiating an investigation into the new Pickton information. Detective Constable Shenher

interviewed Wayne Leng and [REDACTED] both of whom she found credible.

In late August 1998, Constable Dickson submitted to his supervising officers a new list of 35 women missing from the Downtown Eastside that he had started creating while investigating the 1997 list of 71.

By the end of August 1998, Detective Constable Shenher submitted an overview of her investigation to date in which she advised that the Missing Women met a similar profile and most had previously not been out of contact with family and others for more than brief periods. She concluded that their disappearances were suspicious, and that “these cases are related and should be treated as such.”

On September 2nd, 1998, Detective Constable Shenher made contact with Hiscox who provided considerable information about Pickton, including that he had claimed he could dispose of a body by putting it through a grinder and feeding the remains to his pigs. Hiscox had heard about the [REDACTED] incident, and had also heard that Pickton had women’s identification and belongings on his property.

In September, the “Working Group” met twice. Detective Constable Shenher and Sergeant Field attended the second and larger meeting. The Working Group’s plan, developed by Detective Inspector Rossmo, was to ensure there was broad representation in the group from a variety of policing disciplines, and to develop a list of potential victims, conduct linkage analysis, investigate any identified murder series, and examine crime prevention initiatives. At the second meeting of the Working Group, the Major Crimes Section Inspector strenuously disagreed with its approach. It was his view that the investigation should be kept “in house” in the Major Crime Section. In addition to the professional difference of opinion, there were personality conflicts involved. As a result, the Working Group was disbanded, and a proposed press release Detective Inspector Rossmo had prepared, which set out that the Working Group would “determine if a serial murderer is preying upon people in the Downtown Eastside...”, was never released.

On September 16th, 1998, after a number of attempts to find him, Detective Constable Shenher found Hiscox in

the Psychiatric Unit of Surrey Memorial Hospital, where he was being treated for depression, and interviewed him extensively. Detective Constable Shenher briefed RCMP Corporal Connor on the results of this interview, and Corporal Connor conducted further investigation to corroborate the information.

On September 24th, 1998, Corporal Connor requested surveillance of Pickton from the RCMP’s “Special ‘O’” team, but several days of surveillance revealed nothing suspicious.

On October 15th, 1998, Detective Constable Shenher introduced Hiscox to Corporal Connor, who interviewed him in detail. In summary, Hiscox stated a woman friend of Pickton’s named [REDACTED] had told Hiscox that she had seen women’s identification and bloody clothing in Pickton’s trailer, that Pickton had offered to dispose of a body for her if needed, that she thought it was possible Pickton was a serial killer, and that Pickton had asked some friends to “finish off” [REDACTED] for him. Hiscox advised, however, that [REDACTED] was extremely anti-police and wouldn’t be cooperative. Hiscox’s information, while of great interest to the investigation, was hearsay and was considered not to be sufficient to support a search warrant for Pickton’s property.

On November 4th, 1998, Corporal Connor requested aerial surveillance of the Pickton property from RCMP Air Services. He also noted that Staff Sergeant Brock Giles from the VPD Major Crime Section had offered to provide financial assistance for an undercover operation and witness protection to advance the RCMP’s Pickton investigation, and had also suggested there be a joint submission for assistance to the Provincial Unsolved Homicide Unit.

On November 5th, 1998, Constable Dickson submitted another memo expressing his concern about the growing list of women missing from the Downtown Eastside, noting that they could usually be expected to reappear within a few weeks unless foul play was involved.

Throughout the fall of 1998, Detective Constable Shenher, in addition to providing Corporal Connor any information she received about Pickton, worked on a variety of other investigative strategies to find the Missing Women. By December, she learned that three Downtown Eastside

sex trade workers named Tammy Lee Pipe, Tracy Olajide and Victoria Younker had been found murdered in 1995 in the Agassiz/Mission area. She also learned that the RCMP considered the three cases to be linked, and that the RCMP's prime suspect was in custody on another matter. Those circumstances became a matter of great interest to the Missing Women investigation. In December, Detective Constable Shenher made contact with Hiscox again, but he had no new information.

In 1998, 13 women were reported missing from the Downtown Eastside who could not be found.

1999

On February 9th, 1999, Detective Constable Shenher gave a presentation on her investigation at the Carnegie Centre. Detective Inspector Rossmo was present and noted the number of Missing Women. He contacted Deputy Chief Constable Brian McGuinness expressing his concerns about the numbers, and subsequently provided a graph showing how the pattern had changed since 1997.

On February 10th, 1999, VPD investigators met with Corporal Connor and other RCMP members regarding Pickton. Corporal Connor advised that the Provincial Unsolved Homicide Unit was not interested in taking on the investigation because of a lack of information. It was agreed that RCMP and VPD investigators would show Pickton's photograph to Downtown Eastside sex trade workers with the hope of linking him to the area. Because of a higher priority case, the Coquitlam RCMP did not assist, but VPD investigators showed Pickton's photograph to approximately 130 sex trade workers. None admitted to knowing him, likely because he was seen as a "good" date who supplied money and drugs.

Also in February 1999, the VPD's Detective Inspector Rossmo and Inspector Biddlecombe met with Deputy Chief Constable McGuinness. Inspector Biddlecombe suggested that given sufficient time, the Missing Women could be located, because he suspected there would historically be a lag time between sex trade workers going missing and being found. Detective Inspector Rossmo conducted further

statistical analysis which showed that after two weeks, 90% of reported missing persons are found, and after 22 weeks, 99%. He predicted that of the 28 women from the Downtown Eastside then missing, only two would be found.

On February 18th, 1999, Detective Constable Shenher provided a report to Chief Constable Chambers summarizing her investigation to date. In comments to the media in this period, the VPD downplayed the likelihood of a serial killer.

In March 1999, Corporal Connor and Detective Constable Shenher received information that Pickton had visited the New Westminster "stroll." Also in March, Detective Constable Shenher found one of the Missing Women, Ada Prevost, alive in [REDACTED]. She had last been seen in 1997 and had been reported missing in 1998. The discovery of Ms. Prevost provided some hope that others on the Missing Women list might have simply left their lives of prostitution and moved elsewhere.

By the end of March 1999, Maggie de Vries and others were advocating for a police task force dedicated to the investigation and a reward for information about the Missing Women. The VPD's position was that a reward would be counterproductive and that a task force was not yet justified. The Attorney General, Ujjal Dosanjh, offered to contribute to a reward if so requested by the VPD, and in April was briefed on the investigation by the VPD. The RCMP was represented at the meeting by Superintendent Gary Bass.

In April 1999, Constable Dickson was assigned to assist with the Missing Women investigation. In Coquitlam, Corporal Connor arranged a multi-jurisdictional meeting to discuss investigative strategies regarding Pickton. Meanwhile, public pressure continued to build for the creation of a task force and the posting of a reward, and these were resisted by both the VPD and Vancouver's then-mayor, Philip Owen.

By the April 28th, 1999 Police Board meeting, Mayor Owen had changed his mind about a reward. Maggie de Vries was present at the meeting and was very complimentary of the efforts of Detective Constable Shenher and her partner, but pressed the Board to approve a reward and create a task

force. The Board approved a \$100,000 reward, despite the VPD's concerns that a reward would generate a great many bogus tips and that because there was no evidence against which to filter tips, already scarce resources would be wasted on fruitless investigations (a position not supported privately by Detective Constable Shenher). A task force was not approved.

In May 1999, Corporal Connor continued to pursue the Pickton investigation. He arranged for aerial photographs to be taken in order to look for burial sites on the Pickton property, and for surveillance by Special 'O'. After several days, the surveillance was discontinued for lack of results. Corporal Connor kept Detective Constable Shenher apprised of his investigation. Meanwhile, in the Downtown Eastside, the first memorial service for the Missing Women was held.

Also in May 1999, Detective Constable Shenher submitted reports recommending a "suspect-focused" investigative team be created, and set out the significant investigative challenges that needed to be met. Sergeant Field wrote a supportive covering report advising that victim-based enquiries had been exhausted, that there was a strong possibility the Missing Women were the victims of one or more predators, and that the failure to investigate "could result in ... additional disappearances." In a memo to Acting Deputy Chief Constable Doern, Inspector Biddlecombe supported the creation of an investigative team.

On May 19th, 1999, Sergeant Field hosted a brainstorming session, and shortly after, an investigative team, the "Missing Women Review Team" (MWRT), was created. Detective Constable Shenher was assigned full-time, as were Detective Ron Lepine and Detective Constable Mark Chernoff from the Homicide Squad, a clerical assistant, [REDACTED], as well as a "part-time" analyst, Detective Constable Carl Vinje, who would assist depending on his availability. Sergeant Field was assigned as the MWRT supervisor, but was not relieved of her full-time responsibilities as a Homicide Squad supervisor. Detective Inspector Rossmo was named as a "resource."

The creation of the MWRT was a significant event in that the investigation was no longer a missing persons

investigation with a limited investigative capacity. However, the MWRT was not a full-fledged homicide investigative team either. It was something in between – a policing unit that was investigating suspects but was also conducting a missing persons investigation. The hybrid nature of the MWRT indicates that in May 1999, VPD management suspected it was faced with a significant problem, but for a variety of reasons, was not yet able to acknowledge the problem as a matter of serial crime.

From the investigators' point of view, however, the MWRT was perceived as a homicide investigation, although one with limited resources and the challenge of a case where there were no bodies and no evidence apart from the unexplained disappearance of a large number of women with a similar profile.

On May 27th, 1999, Detective Inspector Rossmo submitted an analysis of the Missing Women information. He concluded that the increase in reports of missing sex trade workers was statistically significant and that if the Missing Women had met with foul play, the fact that no bodies had been found made multiple killers working independently unlikely. The most likely explanation, concluded Detective Inspector Rossmo, was a serial killer. The analysis was welcomed by Detective Constable Shenher and others in the MWRT who already believed in this theory, but their opinion was not shared by key VPD management staff, who did not consider Detective Inspector Rossmo's report compelling.

In June 1999, Pickton was identified as the suspect in a threatening incident against a New Westminster sex trade worker, and this information was relayed to Corporal Connor. Although the VPD continued to minimize publicly the likelihood of a serial killer, in the MWRT the investigators vigorously pursued a variety of investigative strategies, including consulting with other agencies that had handled serial killing cases. The RCMP's Behavioural Science Group provided an analysis of the Missing Women case that was based on the theory that a predator was responsible, and made investigative suggestions.

The resources of the MWRT had quickly proved to be inadequate. Sergeant Field documented the "absolutely essential" need for a full-time analyst, but was unsuccessful

in obtaining one. Detective Constable Shenher submitted a report detailing the need for six more investigators, and Detective Constables [REDACTED] and Alex Clarke were soon added to the team.

By this time Sergeant Field had recognized that the Missing Women case was likely multi-jurisdictional since the bodies of the victims of serial killers were historically found in rural areas, not urban ones. As a result, beginning in June 1999, she began to vigorously advocate for a Joint Forces Operation (JFO) with the RCMP, but was unsuccessful for a considerable period of time.

On June 24th, 1999, MWRT investigators met with numerous family members of the Missing Women to brief them on the case and to discuss obtaining familial DNA to assist in identifying any remains that might be discovered.

In mid-July 1999, a new informant, [REDACTED] was referred to the VPD and provided striking information about Pickton to Detective Constable Chernoff. [REDACTED] advised that a woman named Lynn Ellingsen had lived with Pickton and had told [REDACTED] she had assisted Pickton in picking up a sex trade worker and bringing her back to his property. Further, she said she had seen Pickton hang the woman by the neck in his barn, cut strips of flesh off her legs, and murder her. [REDACTED] provided considerable other information, including that Pickton had told him personally that he could dispose of a body “without a trace” if needed. [REDACTED] believed Pickton was responsible for the Missing Women. Upon learning of this information, Detective Lepine immediately abandoned his summer holiday in order to investigate the lead with Detective Constable Chernoff.

On July 27th, 1999, after months of work on a reward poster between City of Vancouver lawyers, provincial government staff, and investigators to finalize the information to be included (e.g., which women would be listed, and wording that would not put women still alive at risk) the VPD released its Missing Women reward poster. It contained photos of 31 women who had gone missing from the Downtown Eastside since 1978. The offering of a major reward when no crime had been identified was unprecedented.

On July 29th, 1999, the MWRT met to discuss the progress of the investigation, and Detective Lepine and Detective Constable Chernoff then went to Coquitlam to meet with the RCMP to discuss the [REDACTED] information. It was agreed that the Coquitlam RCMP would be in charge of the Pickton investigation, but that Detective Lepine and Detective Constable Chernoff would continue to handle [REDACTED] Various investigative strategies for Pickton were discussed.

On July 30th, 1999, Corporal Connor initiated surveillance of Pickton, in what was to be the beginning of a period of intense investigation. The same day, Detective Lepine and Detective Constable Chernoff met with [REDACTED] for their third debrief. [REDACTED] provided additional information about Pickton, and stated he had observed handcuffs in his bed and a “special” freezer in his barn, from which [REDACTED] was served strange meat that he came to believe was human. [REDACTED] reiterated that he was told by Ellingsen that she assisted in bringing sex trade workers back to Pickton’s property and had seen one of the women hanging from a meat hook in Pickton’s barn while Pickton cut strips from her legs. [REDACTED] also said that Ellingsen had seen personal property of sex trade workers in Pickton’s trailer.

On July 31st, 1999, the Missing Women case was featured on the “America’s Most Wanted” television show. No tips of value resulted.

On August 3rd and 4th, 1999, Corporal Connor held meetings on the Pickton investigation in Coquitlam to discuss investigative strategies, and in the afternoon of August 4th he met with Crown counsel to discuss the possibility of obtaining a warrant for video surveillance of Pickton.

The same day, Detective Lepine and Detective Constable Chernoff conducted another debrief of [REDACTED] who advised them that Ellingsen had told another individual named [REDACTED] the same story of seeing the sex trade worker hanging in the barn. [REDACTED] had also told [REDACTED] that Ellingsen was extorting Pickton by threatening to go to police with her information. [REDACTED] agreed to be an “agent” for police to further the investigation.

On August 5th, 1999, the investigators met again in Coquitlam and tasks were assigned to advance the investigation. It was decided that they would try to make [REDACTED] an agent, interview other witnesses, and conduct physical and electronic surveillance of Pickton. Later that day, [REDACTED] was brought in for a formal videotaped interview, but he was in poor condition due to lack of sleep and substance abuse, and the interview was problematic.

On August 6th, 1999, another witness, [REDACTED] came forward to report that Ellingsen had also told her in June 1999 of witnessing the murder in the barn and seeing body parts in Pickton's freezer, and that Ellingsen believed Pickton was a serial killer. Plans were made to interview Ellingsen and re-interview [REDACTED]

On August 10th, 1999, Detective Lepine and Detective Constable Chernoff conducted a two-hour taped interview of [REDACTED] in which he provided information consistent with his debriefs, and also advised that [REDACTED] believed that Pickton was transporting the remains of his victims to a recycling plant. Also on August 10th, two senior Provincial Unsolved Homicide Unit members, who had been brought in to assist the Coquitlam RCMP's investigation, conducted an interview of Ellingsen. She denied ever telling anyone she had witnessed a murder in Pickton's barn and claimed she was talking about seeing a pig butchered.

The Ellingsen interview created a conflict among the investigators, with Corporal Connor and the VPD investigators believing [REDACTED] information, and the Provincial Unsolved Homicide Unit investigators believing Ellingsen's denial that she had witnessed a murder (notwithstanding that her denials were utterly lacking in credibility – she did not simply deny seeing the body, but denied telling anyone the story of seeing the body, and this flew in the face of direct evidence from three witnesses).

On August 11th, 1999, the Pickton investigators met again in Coquitlam to review the case, and the next day, Corporal Connor interviewed both [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] (who was Hiscox's source of information). [REDACTED] reported that Ellingsen had claimed to have been involved in the murder of a sex trade worker, while [REDACTED] denied all knowledge and claimed Pickton was "gentle."

The investigators tried to support the evidence they had. Corporal Connor continued to attempt to corroborate the information about Pickton, and Detective Lepine and Detective Constable Chernoff continued working with [REDACTED] to obtain more information.

On August 24th, 1999, Detective Constable Chernoff contacted the Coquitlam RCMP for an update on their progress regarding Pickton, and learned Corporal Connor had been promoted and transferred out of the Pickton investigation. He was replaced on the file by Coquitlam RCMP Constable [REDACTED]

On August 25th, 1999, Ellingsen was re-interviewed by Constable [REDACTED] and Corporal [REDACTED] of the Provincial Unsolved Homicide Unit. The interview lasted 12 minutes. Ellingsen continued to deny knowledge of a murder, but agreed to take a polygraph. On August 31st, the day it was scheduled, Ellingsen changed her mind.

The Coquitlam RCMP made some efforts to locate and interview Pickton, and committed to pursuing the Pickton investigation, but with the transfer of Corporal Connor, who was the driving force in the investigation, and the Provincial Unsolved Homicide Unit's conclusion that [REDACTED] was not credible, the investigation was effectively derailed. Incredibly frustrated with the turn that the RCMP-led investigation had taken, and their inability to change its course, Detective Lepine and Detective Constable Chernoff returned to the MWRT to pursue other investigative avenues. Their involvement in the MWRT soon evolved into a part-time assignment, as increasing demands of the Homicide Squad took priority.

While Detective Lepine and Detective Constable Chernoff were engaged in the Pickton investigation, the rest of the MWRT had been pursuing other suspects and leads, including aggressively investigating a sex offender named [REDACTED] who would eventually be charged with assaults against sex trade workers, but the investigators' efforts didn't further the Missing Women investigation.

On September 2nd, 1999, Detective Constable Clarke completed a check of thousands of indigent burial records but was unsuccessful at finding any of the Missing Women.

On September 17th, 1999, after extensive investigation, the MWRT confirmed one of the Missing Women, Linda Coombes, had died of an overdose.

On September 19th, 1999, the MWRT met to review the investigation and the status of 480 tips they had received. Sergeant Field noted some of the problems in the Coquitlam RCMP investigation of Pickton and that Constable [REDACTED] had agreed to submit a proposal for an undercover operation targeting Pickton.

On September 22nd, 1999, RCMP Constable [REDACTED] made contact with Pickton to arrange an interview, but was persuaded to wait for rainy weather when he had less work. No further substantive investigation into Pickton would occur until January 2000.

On October 7th, 1999, Inspector Biddlecombe retired and was replaced by Acting Inspector [REDACTED]

On October 22nd, 1999, Sergeant Field submitted a comprehensive summary of the investigation to date. She expressed concerns about the lack of full-time staff and noted that since January 1999, new women who had been reported missing had all been found quickly. She further noted that 537 tips had been assigned for follow-up and they were investigating 13 suspects (with Pickton being number one), but that there was “no end to the number of strange violent men...” that might be responsible for the Missing Women. She advised that the MWRT’s greatest challenge was the time delay between the women being reported missing and the time they were last seen. She also noted that the Coquitlam RCMP was still investigating Pickton. Recognizing that her own responsibilities running a homicide squad compromised her ability to supervise the MWRT, Sergeant Field recommended a full-time Sergeant for the MWRT, but this was not approved.

In November 1999, the VPD’s media liaison, Constable Anne Drennan, acknowledged publicly that there could be a serial killer.

In late November, one of the MWRT’s suspects, [REDACTED] on whom Detective Constables [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] had focused almost exclusively, was by DNA testing eliminated as a suspect in the Agassiz/Mission

murders, which the MWRT believed were linked to the Missing Women case. By early December 1999, another convicted sex offender, who had been the RCMP’s prime suspect in the Agassiz/Mission murders (and therefore a potential suspect for the Missing Women), was by DNA testing also eliminated as a suspect in the same murders.

On December 9th, 1999, Sergeant Field submitted another update on the investigation to her supervising officers, advising that Pickton was still being investigated by the Coquitlam RCMP, but was “not a priority for them...”. She later noted that Detective Lepine and Detective Constable Chernoff had essentially gone back to Homicide, Detective Constables [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] remained focused on [REDACTED] and that based on her conversations with RCMP profilers about serial killer investigations, her “whole focus was on getting the RCMP on board.” That day, Detective Constable Shenher’s request for a full-time MWRT sergeant was denied by Acting Inspector [REDACTED]

On December 14th, 1999, sex trade worker Wendy Crawford was reported missing. She was the first woman reported missing from the Downtown Eastside since January 1999 who could not be accounted for.

On December 15th, 1999, the MWRT located two more of the Missing Women, [REDACTED] and [REDACTED], both of whom were alive and living under new names in [REDACTED]

On December 29th, 1999, Constable [REDACTED] recorded in her notes that the Coquitlam RCMP Pickton file had been inactive because of other priorities.

2000

On January 10th, 2000, Sergeant Field submitted a status report to Acting Inspector [REDACTED] citing the problems created by the lack of an MWRT analyst, highlighting the challenges of searching medical records, advising that no new women had been reported missing since January of 1999 who weren’t accounted for (not yet being aware of the missing person report for Wendy Crawford), setting out various investigative strategies, and summarizing staffing challenges.

On January 13th, 2000, Sergeant Field again met with RCMP profilers for assistance with the Missing Women case. At the meeting, Sergeant Field discussed the status of the RCMP's investigation of Pickton, proposed a BC-wide review of unsolved sex trade worker homicides, and again recommended a Joint Forces Operation with the RCMP.

On January 19th, 2000, RCMP Constables [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] interviewed Pickton. They allowed a woman friend of Pickton's to be present as well. The interview was poorly conducted and was generally unproductive. Pickton denied killing sex trade workers, but gave an evasive answer as to whether DNA from any of the Missing Women might be found on his property. Unfortunately, the constables did not ask follow-up questions on the subject. The only potentially useful result from the interview was that Pickton consented to a search of his property, but this offer was not followed up on by the RCMP.

By February 2000, the RCMP had completed a file review of the Pickton case, and a "game plan" was developed to advance the investigation. Some of the recommendations were initiated, but then abandoned because of other priorities.

On February 10th, 2000, MWRT members met with RCMP profilers to discuss strategies to solve the Agassiz/Mission murders, still believing they might be linked to some of the Missing Women. Detective Constable Shenher reported that the profilers were planning to submit a report to their superiors recommending the Pickton file be re-opened and that a Joint Forces Operation ("JFO") be created.

Meanwhile, the MWRT had acquired familial DNA for 22 of the 27 Missing Women, was still searching medical records, was following-up a variety of tips (some quite bizarre), and was attempting to identify high risk offenders whose custody status might match the pattern of women being reported missing. The investigators were frustrated by the large pool of potential suspects and the lack of information with which to eliminate them. All the while, the investigation and its resources were continuing to deteriorate, and Sergeant Field's continued efforts to convince the RCMP to create a JFO had not been successful.

In March 2000 another woman, Jennifer Furminger, was reported missing from the Downtown Eastside, having last been seen in December 1999.

On April 4th, 2000, Deputy Chief Constable John Unger took over command of the Investigation Division after Deputy Chief Constable McGuinness retired.

On April 10th, 2000, Sergeant Field advised the Police Board that Detective Constable Clarke had left the MWRT and returned to her former duties, as had Detective Lepine and Detective Constable Chernoff. At this point, Sergeant Field felt she could best serve the Missing Women investigation by pursuing a JFO rather than fighting what she believed was a steep uphill battle to keep or acquire additional resources for the MWRT. The Board approved a VPD recommendation to renew the Missing Women reward.

Later in April 2000, two MWRT investigators showed suspect photographs to sex trade workers and several identified Pickton as having visited the Downtown Eastside, which would have been important information for the investigation. The investigators unfortunately did not share this information with anyone else.

On April 14th, 2000, RCMP Air Services obtained aerial photos of the Pickton property for Constable [REDACTED]

On [REDACTED], 2000, Detective Constables [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] arrested [REDACTED] in [REDACTED] on a warrant pursuant to their investigation into sexual assaults on sex trade workers in Vancouver (which later resulted in multiple convictions). The following month Detective Constables [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] were released from the MWRT but were not replaced.

On May 9th, 2000, Sergeant Field advised Inspector Gord Spencer, who had replaced Acting Inspector [REDACTED] the previous month, that she was making progress with having the Provincial Unsolved Homicide Unit or an RCMP task force take over the Missing Women investigation. She believed the RCMP had now conceded the Missing Women were likely to have been murdered in an RCMP jurisdiction.

On May 10th, 2000, Detective Constable Shenher submitted a status report to Sergeant Field advising that if

the Provincial Unsolved Homicide Unit could help, it should focus on three suspects, naming Pickton as number one.

On May 15th, 2000, Constable [REDACTED] noted she was still working on the Pickton file and asked her supervisor for a file extension (i.e., additional time to conduct more investigation).

In July 2000, the MWRT's database, "SIUSS," continued to create frustration, as it had throughout the investigation. Little progress was being made in the investigation generally, and Detective Constable Shenher, burned out by the investigation, requested a transfer.

On August 10th, 2000, VPD Inspector Spencer made a formal request to the RCMP that it review the VPD's complete investigation, which by this time included follow-up on approximately 1,200 tips, investigation of numerous suspects, and extensive records searches. Because of problems with data management and transfer, the file transfer to the RCMP was delayed until October.

To benefit from another police department's experience in investigating serial murder, in early October 2000, Detective Constable Shenher attended a presentation in Spokane regarding the investigation into serial killer Robert Lee Yates. That month she and other VPD members also searched several areas in the Fraser Valley pursuant to tips about a violent sex offender.

In late October 2000, Detective Constable Shenher appeared on a talk show and openly stated, as she had in the past, that she was certain the Missing Women were victims of foul play. Around the same time, she contacted family members of the Missing Women to tell them she would soon be leaving the investigation.

In November 2000, Sergeant Field presented the Missing Women case to a seminar attended by numerous serious crime investigators from around BC. The consensus of the group was that a serial killer was responsible, the case was probably linked to the Agassiz/Mission murders, and a VPD/RCMP JFO was the only way to properly investigate the case. Sergeant Field also learned that there were numerous unsolved homicides of women along the north/south highway corridors in BC.

On November 21st, 2000, Inspector Spencer met with Staff Sergeant Doug Henderson of the Provincial Unsolved Homicide Unit and they agreed a JFO led by the RCMP's Provincial Unsolved Homicide Unit was required.

On November 21st, 2000, Constable [REDACTED] requested that Pickton's DNA (which was on file from the investigation into the attempted murder of [REDACTED] be compared to the suspect DNA from the Agassiz/Mission murders. The DNA did not match and Pickton was eliminated as a suspect in those murders. After that, there were no more entries made in the file notes of the Coquitlam RCMP's investigation into Pickton.

In December 2000, Detective Constable Shenher was transferred from the Missing Persons Unit, bitter and discouraged about how the Missing Women investigation had gone. Before she left, she submitted a detailed report summarizing the Missing Women investigation, including the challenges it faced, and her recommendation that future investigators focus on suspects and on finding the Missing Women's bodies.

Also in December 2000, two more women, Dawn Crey and Deborah Jones, were reported missing from the Downtown Eastside, both of whom had been seen recently. This marked the beginning of another alarming series of reports of women going missing from the Downtown Eastside.

On December 12th, 2000, Sergeant Field met with then-Sergeant Don Adam of the RCMP to discuss the creation of a JFO. They agreed that the investigators needed to identify all potential victims, prioritize suspects, and determine investigative strategies.

2001

On January 17th and 31st, 2001, the newly formed JFO, named Project Evenhanded, held meetings. Sergeant Field attended the meetings and summarized the VPD investigation and the challenges it faced. RCMP analysts explained that they had determined there were 52 unsolved sex trade worker homicides in BC and 31 unsolved "hitchhiker" murders, both numbers far higher than those

in neighboring Alberta. It was agreed that one or more serial killers were responsible for the Missing Women and were adept at disposing of bodies. Investigative approaches were debated and it was determined that the first step for the investigation was to review historical crimes against sex trade workers for the presence of evidence that could now be analyzed for DNA, and to compare any resulting DNA profiles against potential suspects. In addition, there was agreement that the Agassiz/Mission cases, where suspect DNA was present, were likely connected to the Missing Women. This view, unfortunately, made Pickton a suspect of less interest since his DNA did not match the suspect DNA from those murders.

In February 2001, the VPD's Detective Constable Alex Clarke, Detective Trish Keen, and Constable Paul Verral, a forensic identification expert, were assigned to assist the JFO by reviewing historical offences against hitchhikers and sex trade workers in BC. Detectives Jim McKnight and Phil Little from VPD Homicide were assigned to the JFO as investigators. Several meetings occurred to discuss JFO logistics and methods to develop a suspect list and obtain suspect DNA to compare against DNA evidence located in the historical case review.

In March 2001, development of the JFO's infrastructure continued and the RCMP secured office space in Surrey. Sergeant Adam noted in a memo that the VPD had assigned two full-time investigators but the RCMP had not yet done so.

In April 2001, development of the JFO's infrastructure continued, including selection of an investigative database to replace SIUSS. At that point, the historical review of offences against sex trade workers was well underway. The JFO was advised by the VPD Missing Persons Unit that, despite extensive efforts to find them, sex trade workers Dawn Crey, Deborah Jones and Brenda Wolfe, who had recently been reported missing, could not be located, as well as another woman meeting the profile, Georgina Papin, who was reported missing to the Surrey RCMP.

In May 2001, Sergeant Field briefed VPD Management on the investigation, advising that a serial killer was likely responsible for the Missing Women. The Police Board approved the VPD's recommendation that the \$100,000

reward be renewed and, by the end of the month, a Memorandum of Understanding had been developed between the VPD and the RCMP setting out the goals of the investigation and resource commitments from each agency, which initially totaled twelve full-time members.

By mid-June 2001, multiple exhibits suitable for DNA analysis had been located in the historical review.

In July 2001, despite the VPD being part of a JFO targeted on solving a serial killer case, a member of the VPD nevertheless made statements to a Missing Woman family member minimizing this possibility. In the same month, venomous complaints by Missing Women family members were leveled over comments made to them by a civilian member of the Missing Persons Unit. The civilian member had dealt with many of the family members before Detective Constable Shenher took over the investigation, and was the focus of many complaints against the VPD around the Missing Women investigation.

By late August 2001, several more women who had been seen recently were reported missing to the VPD and RCMP. Through extensive records searches, the JFO learned there were up to 22 more women missing in BC who met the profile of the Missing Women. The JFO members became concerned that, contrary to their assumption when the JFO investigation began, they were not dealing with a "historical" serial murder investigation review in which all the murders had taken place prior to early 1999. In fact, eleven Missing Women had been reported missing and last seen in 2000 and 2001, and six women last seen in 1999 but reported in 2000 and 2001 also met the Missing Women profile. The serial killer was clearly active.

On August 30th, 2001, (now) Staff Sergeant Adam presented senior managers from the VPD and the RCMP with a management briefing on the investigation to seek additional resources. He summarized the investigation to date, set out the investigative challenges (including hundreds of potential suspects) and the JFO's strategies, and stressed the urgency of adding resources and identifying a suspect, advising that "from all indications, sex trade workers are continuing to go missing."

On September 7th, 2001, Staff Sergeant Adam's warning was repeated in a memo from Acting Inspector Al Boyd (who had replaced Inspector Spencer in April) to VPD Deputy Chief Constable Unger in which he recommended the VPD add five more investigators to the JFO and considerable other resources. This request was approved immediately and implemented within weeks. The VPD's efforts to acquire additional funding from the City of Vancouver, so that the investigators to be loaned to the JFO could be replaced, were rebuffed, but the VPD nevertheless proceeded to contribute investigators to the JFO, resulting in numerous vacancies that grew as the size of the JFO increased.

Also in September 2001, several major media articles on the Missing Women investigation appeared. They focused on the VPD's lack of resources during its MWRT investigation, the failure of the RCMP to become involved earlier, and criticism of the VPD and JFO for a lack of results. In one article, the VPD's media spokesperson again minimized the possibility there was a serial killer at large.

In October 2001, VPD members from the Sexual Offence Squad met with Staff Sergeant Adam to provide names of potential suspects, including Pickton.

On October 14th, 2001, JFO investigators met with 35-40 family members of the Missing Women to brief them on the investigation. The meeting reportedly went well, but there were continued complaints by family members about the VPD civilian member in the Missing Persons Unit. The complaints resulted in a VPD review of Missing Persons Unit policies and specific attention was paid to the conduct of the civilian employee.

Later in October 2001, concerns were raised that the JFO was not learning quickly enough about new reports of women missing from the Downtown Eastside. In addition, it was noted that the investigation was hampered by not benefiting from the knowledge of Detective Constable Shenher. Staff Sergeant (now Inspector) Adam would later note that the JFO investigators were not familiar with the culture of the Downtown Eastside sex trade workers and wrongly assumed that they were transient, which resulted in time and resources wasted looking for them across Canada.

By late October 2001, the JFO had determined that a highly proactive approach to complement the investigation was required. In other words, police would try to catch the killer by working in a semi-covert capacity in the Downtown Eastside and developing information from sex trade workers and others. Both the RCMP and the VPD immediately responded to the JFO's call for assistance by committing a total of 12 investigators to a proactive team.

In November 2001, the JFO consulted with several American police agencies with experience investigating serial killer cases involving sex trade workers. A supplementary Missing Women poster was released with 18 new Missing Women. The JFO also took responsibility for investigating all new reports made to the VPD Missing Persons Unit of women meeting the profile of the Missing Women.

In November and December 2001, three more women, Heather Bottomley, Mona Wilson and Dianne Rock were reported missing to the VPD. All met the Missing Women profile, and all had been last seen earlier in 2001.

2002

In January 2002, the JFO's semi-covert 12-officer proactive team began operation in the Downtown Eastside.

On February 4th, 2002, the Missing Women investigation took a dramatic turn. A junior Coquitlam RCMP member, Constable Nathan Wells, obtained a search warrant for the Pickton farm based on an informant's information that Pickton was in possession of an illegal firearm. Because Pickton was entered on CPIC as a person of interest to the JFO, Constable Wells advised the JFO of his information and invited JFO investigators to attend while he executed the search warrant the next day.

The JFO was not then targeting Pickton, but it was agreed JFO investigators would wait near the property while it was searched. During the search for the firearm, the investigators observed a piece of identification and an inhaler belonging to two of the Missing Women. As a result, the JFO investigators were called on to the property.

The weapons search was suspended and the property was sealed off. JFO investigators began work on a warrant to search for evidence related to the murder of the Missing Women, which was executed the next day.

This investigation turned into the largest serial murder investigation in Canadian history. The VPD initially contributed 29 police investigators and two civilian employees who joined dozens of RCMP members in the investigation at the Pickton property. The investigative team eventually swelled to over 280 police and civilian employees at its peak. Within weeks, Pickton was charged with the murders of two of the Missing Women, and has since been charged with the murders of a total of 26 Missing Women.

PART II: ANALYSIS OF THE MISSING WOMEN INVESTIGATION

INTRODUCTION

Part II of the Review provides a detailed analysis of the investigation and is summarized here. The analysis identifies the internal and external factors that contributed to a serial killer operating in the Lower Mainland for so long.

Much of the MWRT's work was of a high quality and was admirably carried out by the investigators. However, there is no doubt that the VPD's investigation could have been improved. There were three primary causes of the deficiencies in the VPD investigation: (a) the failure of the VPD to accept the serial killer theory in a timely way and a corresponding failure to provide the investigation with sufficient resources, (b) a failure to follow major case management principles, and (c) jurisdictional problems.

With respect to the Pickton investigation specifically, despite the excellent work of the RCMP's Corporal Mike Connor while he was assigned to the Pickton investigation, it was the RCMP's failed pre-2002 investigation into Pickton, not the deficiencies in the VPD investigation, that allowed Pickton to continue operating for so long. However, although the Pickton investigation was the RCMP's responsibility, VPD management should have shown more leadership and put more high-level pressure on the RCMP to investigate Pickton more vigorously.

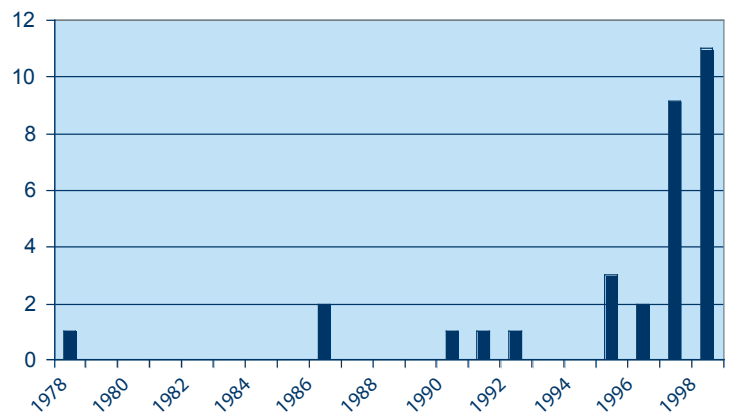
Analysis of these and other key issues is provided in the Review, as well as recommendations for the future. A summary of the analysis follows.

THE VPD'S LACK OF COMMITMENT TO THE SERIAL KILLER THEORY

By the summer of 1999, there was ample evidence, albeit statistical and circumstantial, to believe that a serial killer was most likely responsible for the Missing Women. The longer the Missing Women remained missing despite exhaustive efforts to find them – and despite their historically frequent contact with society in various ways – the more compelling was this evidence. There was strong evidence pointing to Pickton as the killer, which could only add to the credibility of the serial killer theory. Further, it was already known that an unidentified serial killer had murdered sex trade workers Pipe, Olajide and Younker in 1995, all of whom were associated with the Downtown Eastside.

The theory that a serial killer was behind the disappearances was always present in the investigation, but senior police officers in charge of overseeing the Missing Women investigation didn't commit to the serial killer theory for several reasons. These included an erroneous belief that the Missing Women were transient, and that other theories could explain their absence. There was a mindset among several police managers that physical evidence (i.e., a body) was required to begin a murder investigation, although this view was not shared by all the investigators. In addition, for a variety of reasons, VPD management gave insufficient weight to Detective Inspector Rossmo's statistical and epidemiological-style analysis of the Missing Women. In part, this was the result of personality conflicts with Detective Inspector Rossmo and in part it was due to a belief that statistical evidence alone could not justify concluding that the Missing Women had been murdered, despite the compelling circumstantial evidence that supported the statistical analysis.

Senior police managers also placed too much emphasis on the fact that Constable Dickson had accounted for the majority of women on a previous list of missing women in 1997, and had little regard for the more concerning fact that he had accomplished that task quite easily, yet the Missing Women couldn't be located despite a much more exhaustive investigation.



Finally, by the time the MWRT got underway, and throughout the rest of 1999 and most of 2000, it appeared that no new women had gone missing from the Downtown Eastside. This lessened the perceived urgency, and investigative priority, of the case.

Throughout 2000, there was no proper management assessment of the investigation, and it deteriorated. Various managers in the Investigation Division took a hands-off approach to the investigation, and consequently had insufficient knowledge of the many problems within the MWRT, and with the investigative approach. A diffusion and dilution of information as it moved up the chain of command contributed to this problem, as did the rapid turnover of management staff. In addition, there was a lack of clarity around the goals of the investigation: the problem that the investigative team was facing wasn't clearly defined and so the response was erratic. Sergeant Field and the investigative team were not given the support they needed by VPD management, who did not recognize the seriousness of the problem. This case underscores the importance of proper, periodic management reviews of significant investigations.

BIAS AGAINST SEX TRADE WORKERS

Allegations have been made against the VPD that the problems with the investigation were the result of an institutional bias against sex trade workers: that if the women were from higher income neighborhoods in Vancouver, the investigation would have received a different priority. Some critics have also suggested that the failure of the VPD to post a warning to sex trade workers that a serial killer was operating in the Downtown Eastside is evidence of this institutional bias against sex trade workers.

There is no doubt that the disappearance of a large number of women with more conventional lives than sex trade workers would have been greeted with greater alarm than the disappearance of the Missing Women. This is not because the sex trade workers were considered “second class” citizens, but because the nature of their lives is much more unpredictable and risky than more conventional lifestyles. Sex trade workers normally have little day to day accountability to employers, nuclear families, schools and the like, and are constantly exposed to risk of death by disease, drug overdose or at the hands of any one of the numerous violent men who seek to pick up sex trade workers on any given day. While there was a significant misconception prevalent in the VPD as to the transience of “low track” sex trade workers beyond a lack of day to day accountability for their whereabouts, it is also the case that the Missing Women were often reported missing long after last being seen, which lent credence to the theory that they were transient and that long absences were not unexpected by those who knew them.

A review of the track record of VPD responses to offences against sex trade workers shows that the VPD commits extraordinary resources to the investigation of known serious offences against sex trade workers, and has had remarkable results in the most challenging circumstances.

Some of the allegations of bias were likely fuelled by administrative delays and difficulties faced by families and friends when reporting sex trade workers as missing. It also appears that the conduct of one civilian VPD staff member, who was working in the Missing Persons Unit prior to the Missing Women investigation, poisoned relations with the families of some of the Missing Women. These factors

compromised the investigation by creating a lack of trust in the VPD by some of the families of the Missing Women. This problem underscores the importance of certain skills necessary in the Missing Persons Unit (which was one of the subjects of a detailed audit of the Unit in late 2004). In addition, had there been a victim liaison in the MWRT, as required by the Major Case Management model, rather than Detective Constable Shenher trying to juggle this responsibility with many others, some of the damage done to the VPD’s relationship with some of the family members of the Missing Women could have been mitigated.

The lack of a formal, unequivocal warning that a serial killer had been operating was misguided, but was not the result of a lack of concern for sex trade workers. The VPD’s failure to issue a warning arose from the reluctance of the VPD to recognize and acknowledge that a serial killer was likely the cause of the disappearances. The possibility that a serial killer was at work was, however, widely appreciated by the sex trade workers themselves. In any event, while making a strong public warning may have been useful as a catalyst to improve the investigation, it would not have resulted in changes to the high-risk behaviours of the sex trade workers of the Downtown Eastside, which are driven by their addictions and marginalization.

It should also be noted that the VPD has made great strides in improving relationships with sex trade workers, as demonstrated by the positive relationships built with sex trade worker advocacy groups through VPD-initiated collaborative training to reduce violence against marginalized women.

THE IMPACT OF RESOURCE SHORTAGES ON THE MISSING WOMEN INVESTIGATION

Due to a variety of internal and external factors, the VPD overall was chronically short of sworn officers and civilian support staff during the Missing Women investigation. In addition to its “routine” work, the VPD’s Major Crime Section was also dealing with an alarming series of violent home invasions against very elderly victims, and a series of armed robberies of Asian citizens in their residential garages. In addition, the homicide rate spiked over 50% from 1998 to 1999, with several extraordinary cases. Prior to and during the operation of the MWRT, considerable resources were committed to these other investigations. This made it difficult to properly resource the MWRT, and all the officers interviewed for this Review reflected on the difficulty each had coping with inadequate resources provided to the Missing Women investigation.

However, while inadequate resources contributed to the MWRT’s problems by causing managers to allocate resources to investigations only when absolutely necessary, they were not the root cause of its deficiencies. If VPD management had accepted the serial killer theory as being the most likely cause of the disappearances, it was within the VPD’s capacity to create a task force to investigate the Missing Women as homicide victims (notwithstanding that a multi-agency team was necessary to give the investigation a reasonable chance of success). Furthermore, if a task force was deemed necessary to conduct a serial killer investigation, more pressure could have been applied to the RCMP and to the Attorney General to contribute resources.

THE NEED FOR A MULTI-JURISDICTIONAL INVESTIGATION

There was a clear need demonstrated in the Missing Women investigation for a multi-jurisdictional investigation. This likely would have occurred had the VPD and the RCMP accepted in the spring of 1999 that a serial killer was responsible for the Missing Women, and recognized that the victims would likely be found in rural locations, as occurred with the Agassiz/Mission murders. A JFO was essential to enable an unrestricted flow of information regarding cases

and evidence in various Lower Mainland jurisdictions, which was a problem in the Missing Women investigation. In addition, the magnitude of the crimes placed a strain on any single agency to provide the resources necessary, as is evidenced by the scale that Project Evenhanded eventually reached.

In this case, as there was no triggering mechanism or overarching provincial framework/criteria for JFO formation in place, and so a JFO required the consent of both the VPD, which advocated for a JFO, and the RCMP, which initially resisted it.

There is much in the policing literature pointing to problems in serial offender investigations being compromised because of police departments being “linkage blind” and having an unwillingness to share information and collaborate with other police departments. With respect to linkage blindness in the Missing Women investigation, the collection of evidence was not sufficiently systematic, there were ongoing difficulties in establishing and maintaining open lines of communication with the RCMP, and evidence gathered by officers in the VPD and the RCMP was sometimes not shared effectively, even within their respective organizations, let alone with each other.

But with respect to an unwillingness to collaborate with other police departments, that was certainly not the case with the VPD. In fact, the opposite was true. The MWRT consulted widely and Sergeant Field made repeated efforts to involve the RCMP in the Missing Women investigation. Unfortunately, she was unsuccessful for too long, despite her resolve and well-founded determination that a JFO with the RCMP was necessary for the investigation to succeed. The RCMP should have become involved in a JFO much earlier than it was, and Sergeant Field’s managers in the VPD should have done more to advance this agenda. The case had little chance of being solved without the RCMP’s involvement, due to the volume of potential evidence located in RCMP jurisdictions, and the likelihood that a serial killer would dispose of victims’ bodies in a rural location. Furthermore, the RCMP has a much greater capacity to marshal the extraordinary resources necessary for a serial murder investigation, as it demonstrated in February 2002.

More attention needs to be paid to the issues of integration and amalgamation/regionalization of resources if serial offender investigations are to be successful. Had there been a regional police force in the Lower Mainland at the time of the Missing Women investigation, many of the barriers created by jurisdictional issues (such as the VPD's lack of control over the Coquitlam RCMP's Pickton investigation) would have been moot. At the least, there needs to be a mechanism to rapidly create (and fund) multi-agency responses to urgent problems such as an active serial killer. Problems in the Missing Women investigation generally, and the Pickton investigation specifically, could have been mitigated had there been better systems in place.

In addition, there needs to be a regional approach to missing persons cases to (a) ensure jurisdictional issues do not create barriers to reporting missing persons, (b) to harmonize policies for the handling of reports, and (c) to provide that statistical analysis of the regional information can be conducted to ensure that missing persons cases aren't considered in isolation, which can result in suspicious patterns being missed. Some of these problems have now been resolved as the RCMP and the BC Association of Municipal Chiefs of Police committed to create a provincial missing persons analysis capacity in 2004, and began its implementation in early 2005.

HOW THE VPD INVESTIGATION COULD HAVE BEEN IMPROVED

Pickton was not arrested earlier than he was primarily because of failures in the RCMP's Port Coquitlam investigation from the summer of 1998 through to early 2000, when it essentially ended. Notwithstanding the problems in the Coquitlam RCMP's investigation and the need for a multi-jurisdictional approach to the Missing Women investigation, the VPD investigation could have been improved in many respects. Although the end result may have been no different, that wasn't known at the time, and the VPD had a responsibility to properly manage the investigation.

The principles of major case management were not implemented in the MWRT investigation. There was an insufficient number of VPD members trained in major case management at the time, and a lack of understanding at the

VPD management level of the core principles. However, there were several trained members available for advice, and contemporaneous to the MWRT's work, there had been an internal analysis of another investigation – with challenges strikingly similar to the Missing Women investigation – which resulted in the implementation of proper major case management protocols. Unfortunately, the way in which the Missing Women case was defined by VPD management, i.e., as primarily a missing persons case for the most part, rather than a serial murder investigation, constrained the VPD's appreciation of the MWRT as a case for which major case management should have been employed, as did VPD management's lack of knowledge of the significant problems in the investigation.

Had proper major case management protocols been implemented, the effectiveness of the investigation could have been improved in several areas. A better command structure was necessary, with a "command triangle" composed of a full-time, on-site team commander, an experienced primary investigator, and a file coordinator. In addition, the capacity to focus on suspects and initiate potentially effective investigative strategies was limited by a lack of investigators.

The team commander needed to have control over personnel issues, such as significant problems created by two of the investigators, whose conduct compromised the investigation and demoralized the other investigators. Had they been focused on team objectives rather than their own, they may very well have contributed to a more successful investigation into Pickton in the summer of 1999 and into the spring of 2000. The assignment of a full-time team commander with the appropriate authority could have mitigated the problems caused by the assignment of these two investigators to the MWRT.

Detective Inspector Rossmo needed to be better integrated into the investigation. Although he was not an experienced "traditional" violent crime investigator, through his academic studies into predatory criminals and his subsequent geographic profiling work on numerous serial offender cases, he had exposure to serial killer cases that was unique in the VPD. He also had analytical abilities that could have contributed greatly to the investigation. For

a variety of reasons, VPD management failed to exploit Detective Inspector Rossmo's talents when they were needed the most.

The media strategy for the Missing Women investigation was inadequate, focusing too much on finding "missing" women, and not enough on solving a murder case. A well-thought out media strategy could have been used to "drive the offender to ground," to leverage more resources, to generate activity by the offender that might have provided leads, or to generate information from particular populations, such as those who live in the Downtown Eastside. Contrary to usual practice in the VPD, the media strategy was being driven – or at least influenced – by managers who either didn't believe in the serial killer theory, or felt that publicly acknowledging a serial killer would only create more problems, or both. The media strategy should have flowed from an investigative strategy, rather than a public relations strategy, but the lack of clarity as to the purpose of the investigation made a focused media strategy difficult.

In retrospect, it is clear that there was considerable information held by sex trade workers and others. It will never be known whether an effective, targeted media strategy (particularly in conjunction with "on the ground" resources) might have been helpful in developing information that would have advanced the Pickton investigation in the summer of 1999.

In April 1999, the Police Board approved a reward in the Missing Women case, against the recommendations of the VPD. In doing so, the Police Board strayed into operational policing, which is outside of its role. While the decision to approve the reward may very well have been a good one, it was not the Board's decision to make; Police Boards should not insert themselves into operational decision-making.

When the MWRT began in May 1999, it appeared that women had stopped going missing the previous January. But by early 2001, when the JFO began to review the VPD investigation, women had started to go missing again. The VPD should have considered proactive strategies until the JFO was sufficiently resourced to take on this responsibility.

The MWRT was also plagued with problems related to the management and analysis of information. This problem of "information overload," and the inevitable inability to process, analyze, and prioritize data, contributed to frustration and delays in the investigation. The VPD Investigation Division did not have available properly trained analysts to perform functions crucial to managing large amounts of data in a case where the offender was unknown and there were many potential suspects. Even with an effective analysis of the information, there was an organizational climate in the VPD that seemed to have discouraged Detective Constable Shenher and even Sergeant Field from forcefully expressing their professional views to management. For a variety of reasons, the culture within the VPD at that time was not conducive to candid discussions and brainstorming outside of the investigative team.

Despite these problems, the difficulties with information management and analysis did not contribute to a failure to identify a suspect in the Missing Women case, i.e., that information about Pickton was "missed" because of problems with the analytical software (although information was missed because of the conduct of two MWRT investigators), or that Pickton wasn't rated as highly as he should have been as a suspect due to the problems with SIUSS (as he was the MWRT's top suspect throughout the VPD investigation). However, this in no way lessens the importance of taking steps to ensure that investigators have the benefits of an effective electronic case management system and staff trained in its effective operation.

In 1995, Justice Archie Campbell conducted an inquiry into the Paul Bernardo investigation and produced a comprehensive report that provided a "blueprint" for serial predator investigations. A key issue in his report was the use of major case management software, and he recommended standardization by government. The Ontario government took concerted and aggressive action to approve this recommendation, amongst others, but the BC government took no action, other than to encourage all police agencies in BC to contribute to the Violent Criminal Linkage Analysis System (ViCLAS).

In 2001, the VPD implemented a new electronic records management system, "PRIME", which the BC Solicitor

General subsequently championed as a provincial standard. PRIME has improved information sharing between participating police agencies, but it was not originally designed for major case management. However, it now includes an efficient module for such cases. Unfortunately, there are still multiple electronic major case management systems in use in BC. Standardization is necessary to prevent problems in future multi-jurisdictional investigations.

Despite the weaknesses in the MWRT investigation, most of the members of the MWRT performed in what could fairly be described as a heroic manner in the face of extremely challenging circumstances. This was particularly true of Detective Constable Shenher, whose work was extraordinary. Detective Constable Mark Chernoff and Detective Ron Lepine demonstrated great skill and dedication in their work with informant [REDACTED]. Detective Constable Alex Clarke was assigned a futile task in reviewing government records, but persevered without complaint, and would later do other important work for the JFO. Constable Dickson used his extensive knowledge of the Downtown Eastside to assist the investigation.

Sergeant Field also performed admirably, particularly with respect to advancing the case for a JFO, despite being overwhelmed and often unsupported. In being assigned the MWRT on top of full-time duties as a Homicide Squad sergeant, she was, in effect, destined to fail. If she could have done anything better in the circumstances, it may have been to more forcefully articulate in writing to her superiors what was necessary for the investigation to be improved. But that is with the luxury of hindsight, and the record demonstrates that it likely would have made no difference, because of the lack of willingness of her managers to be more aggressive, both internally and with the RCMP, about the need for a better-resourced and more dynamic investigation.

The weaknesses in the MWRT investigation are attributable to both systemic issues and the lack of sufficient management attention to the case. At the middle manager level, frequent absences due to illness by one manager and a staff sergeant (his immediate subordinate) combined with short-term manager assignments following the original manager's retirement, were contributing factors to a

lack of proper attention to the investigation. The lack of management's knowledge of basic facts of the investigation was troubling, and demonstrated poor management controls, although a lack of resources contributed to this problem as well.

There was also a lack of clarity around the purpose of the MWRT. The investigators understood it to be a "review team," while one manager felt it was a proper task force in everything but name, and that it was called a "review team" only to avoid embarrassing the Police Board, ostensibly because the Board had decided a task force wasn't needed.

At the Executive level in 1999 and 2000, an unhealthy dynamic contributed to a lack of sufficient communication around the MWRT investigation, and it was allowed to deteriorate. The fact that no new women were known to be going missing made this deterioration easier to justify. The Deputy Chief Constable who was ultimately responsible for the Missing Women investigation was not sufficiently engaged, and took little action to ensure the investigation proceeded appropriately; however, he and Chief Constable Blythe subsequently showed leadership in ensuring that the VPD participated in the JFO, despite a lack of additional funding from the City.

THE PICKTON INVESTIGATION PRIOR TO THE FEBRUARY 2002 SEARCH WARRANTS

When the Pickton case "broke" in February 2002, there was an intense media response that resulted in widespread condemnation of the VPD for allegedly failing to follow up on information about Pickton. The RCMP was characterized as having "rescued" the investigation, and of finding the information to solve the case during a review of VPD files. This was patently false. Despite many unfounded allegations made against the VPD, the RCMP chose not to issue a statement clarifying that the VPD had shared all information about Pickton, and that the RCMP had been in charge of the investigation into the Pickton information from the beginning. The lack of response by the RCMP was not in keeping with the finest traditions of that organization.

The information from all the informants was that Pickton had killed one or more women on his property in Port

Coquitlam. Where the victims worked or lived was irrelevant; the location of the crime determines jurisdiction, and there was no evidence to suggest the victims were taken to Pickton's property against their will. The Coquitlam RCMP clearly had, and accepted, jurisdictional responsibility for the Pickton investigation. This fact was never in dispute.

The investigation of Pickton prior to February 2002 was inadequate and a failure of major case management. The amount of information pointing to Pickton was such that the investigation had to continue to either eliminate Pickton as a suspect, or gather evidence against him. There was, however, a lack of effective analysis of the information pointing at Pickton, and this prevented a full appreciation of its credibility. The investigators had (a) evidence of Pickton's violent attack on [REDACTED]; (b) the informant information from Hiscox, [REDACTED], [REDACTED] and [REDACTED]; (c) Ellingsen's denial to police that she'd described Pickton committing a murder to anyone, despite several informants independently and without collusion providing that information; (d) Pickton's interactions with sex trade workers in New Westminster; (e) Pickton's ability to dispose of bodies, and the informant information regarding Pickton's statements to that effect; and (f) Pickton's admission to having handcuffs, refusal to take a polygraph, and evasive answer as to the likelihood of victim DNA being found on his property. Taken together, the investigators clearly had sufficient information to justify an aggressive investigation into Pickton.

Instead, the Provincial Unsolved Homicide Unit investigators' conclusion that [REDACTED]'s information was not credible, combined with the transfer of Corporal Connor, effectively derailed the investigation and it languished. Corporal Connor's replacement, Constable [REDACTED] did not have Corporal Connor's experience or influence within the RCMP, and she was unable to convince her superiors to apply adequate resources to the investigation, despite her clear understanding of what needed to be done.

The January 2000 interview of Pickton conducted by Constables [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] was poorly conducted. Pickton was allowed to have a friend present, the interview wasn't properly planned or executed, and an evasive answer

and his consent to search his property were not followed up. The failure of the RCMP to consult with the VPD or even advise that the interview was taking place is inexplicable.

After the interview there was very little investigation of Pickton by the Coquitlam RCMP, which Constable [REDACTED] attributed to a lack of resources and a failure by the RCMP to give the investigation the appropriate priority.

There were many potential investigative avenues that could have been pursued had the resources been applied, including, but certainly not limited to: continuing to use [REDACTED] as an informant, and possibly using him as an agent; making efforts to follow up on Pickton's offer and conduct a "consent" search to find evidence or develop grounds to obtain a search warrant; continuing to pursue co-operation from Ellingsen, who eventually did become a cooperating witness against Pickton; seeking information from other potential witnesses that could have assisted the investigation; conducting a second interview of Pickton using a highly-skilled police interrogator; revisiting the potential for charges to be laid in the [REDACTED] incident; and, arresting Pickton and employing a sophisticated interview and interrogation strategy using a cellmate, preceded and/or followed by a well-planned interrogation.

Pickton should not have been excluded as a suspect in the Missing Women investigation just because he was not linked to the murders of Pipe, Younker and Olajide. It was an error to assume that only one serial killer could have operated in a geographical area as large as the Lower Mainland and Fraser Valley, over the span of time involved.

An obvious question is, why didn't the JFO target Pickton? There was considerable information available pointing to him, but it appears that despite the JFO's expertise, their understanding of the investigation of Pickton that had taken place was limited, which highlights the crucial need for mechanisms to ensure information is properly analyzed and effectively shared.

The Pickton investigation was extraordinary because, like the Missing Women case generally, it concerned an allegation of murder where there was no body or other concrete evidence to confirm a murder had actually occurred. Were there a body, no doubt the information

would have been treated differently. But personality conflicts or opinions about credibility without supporting evidence should never have derailed a murder investigation. Decisions must be made based on careful analysis of the available information, and in consideration of the nature of the investigation: the more serious the allegations and the greater the risk to lives, the greater the care that must be taken in making decisions about how those allegations will be investigated. The opinion of the Provincial Unsolved Homicide Unit investigators that the informant information was not credible was an opinion only. Neither that opinion nor the lack of resources in the Coquitlam RCMP detachment should have been sufficient to derail an investigation when the allegations were so serious. The information available was so compelling that it demanded a continued aggressive investigation.

Had the Coquitlam RCMP investigation into Pickton been successful, the future inadequacies of the VPD Missing Women investigation would have been moot because the case could have been solved within months of the MWRT beginning its work in the spring of 1999.

Notwithstanding that responsibility for the investigation clearly lay with the Coquitlam RCMP, management-level pressure from the VPD could have, and should have, been applied to re-invigorate the RCMP's investigation, rather than acquiescing to the RCMP's position that they were continuing the investigation, when clearly they were not giving it a high priority. Although resources were tight, it was never disputed that given compelling information of a murder, the VPD could have, and would have, applied more resources to the Missing Women investigation.

The impact of the failed 1999 investigation into Pickton was enormous, given the tragedy that could potentially have been averted: after August 1999, 13 more sex trade workers went missing, and DNA and other evidence links eleven of these 13 women to the Pickton property.

CONCLUSION

The VPD's initial response to reports of women going missing from the Downtown Eastside – the assignment of Detective Constable Shenher to the case – was reasonable, but the VPD was slow to recognize that a serial killer was likely at work. Even when it was acknowledged that a serial killer could be the cause of the Missing Women, the acknowledgement was made with some reluctance and the resulting “review team” was under-resourced and inadequately managed in light of the magnitude of the investigation they faced. Notwithstanding the challenges, the work of several individual officers in the MWRT was extraordinary.

The degree of difficulty involved in the Missing Women investigation cannot be overstated; there is no more challenging investigation than a serial murder case, even for the most well-resourced and well-managed investigation. The JFO had considerable resources and skill, yet its investigative strategy did not lead it to Pickton, whose undoing was a search for a firearm unrelated to the JFO's investigation. In the Missing Women case, there were no bodies, witnesses, or forensic evidence, and the lifestyle of the Missing Women created enormous investigative challenges. This Review has found the VPD's investigation could have been greatly improved, but the failings must be considered in the context of the incredible investigative challenges, as well as systemic barriers.

Ironically, even had the VPD's MWRT been a model for investigative excellence, it would likely have made no difference in the absence of a proper investigation of Pickton by the RCMP in Coquitlam. The VPD passed on all information in its possession about Pickton and assisted the RCMP-led investigation in every way it could. The investigation failed because it was mismanaged by the RCMP. The VPD's mistake in the Pickton investigation was not to demand more forcefully, and at a more senior level, that the RCMP do more.

Steps must be taken to eliminate or minimize the barriers that derailed the original Pickton investigation. What is needed is better analysis to provide “triggers” for a major investigation; better communication between RCMP detachments, RCMP “Headquarters,” and municipal departments; and better mechanisms to more quickly create Joint Forces Operations run by properly trained major case

managers. Some of these issues have been addressed to some extent recently, such as an RCMP initiative to ensure there is a pool of high-level major case managers available in British Columbia, the creation of a provincial missing persons analysis unit, and the integration of some homicide units. However, more work is needed to develop specific initiatives to address other systemic barriers identified in this Review.

The Missing Women investigation eventually became a Joint Forces Operation of unprecedented scale and an investigation that has been described as a model of excellence in a number of respects, including inter-agency cooperation. However, additional steps to improve policing in BC must be taken to ensure that cases of serial murder in British Columbia are identified as such at an early date and are responded to with investigative and operational strategies equal to the task.

RECOMMENDATIONS

TO THE VANCOUVER POLICE DEPARTMENT

The Review makes eleven recommendations to the VPD, including:

- that the VPD ensure adequate major case management training is provided;
- that the Inspectors selected to be in charge of the Major Crime Section have the necessary experience;
- that the Executive be fully briefed on major cases;
- that the major case management model is followed for task force investigations;
- that the VPD ensure replacement officers in a major case investigation team are fully briefed on the investigation; and
- that the current efforts by the VPD to forge improved relationships with the sex trade workers of the Downtown Eastside continue to be strongly supported by VPD management.

REGARDING THE CITY OF VANCOUVER

- The VPD should encourage the City of Vancouver to continue to support the resource needs of the VPD so that no major investigation is compromised by a lack of sufficient staff and expertise.

REGARDING THE PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT AND THE B.C. ASSOCIATION OF CHIEFS OF POLICE

The VPD should encourage the Provincial Government and the B.C. Association of Chiefs of Police to:

- create a protocol or framework for the rapid formation of multi-jurisdictional major case investigations, including mechanisms to seek assistance, and for extraordinary funding for such investigations;
- conduct an examination of the benefits of a regional police force in the Lower Mainland;
- develop provincial standards for the management of major cases in BC, and that support be provided for the RCMP's major case management accreditation process, which should include municipal police departments;
- strike a Provincial committee of key stakeholders to study and make recommendations regarding a single uniform computerized case management system by police agencies throughout British Columbia for major cases; and
- continue to support the new provincial analysis unit to examine missing persons cases and to provide further attention to eliminating barriers to making missing persons reports.

EPILOGUE

This review was substantially completed by 2005; much has happened since then.

On December 9, 2007 Robert Pickton was convicted of second degree murder in the deaths of Sereena Abotsway, Adrea Joesbury, Mona Wilson, Georgina Papin, Brenda Wolfe, and Marnie Frey. He was sentenced to life in prison with no hope for parole for 25 years. The Supreme Court of Canada upheld these convictions. As a result, charges were stayed related to the 20 additional murders of Andrea Borhaven, Heather Bottomley, Heather Chinnock, Wendy Crawford, Sarah Devries, Tiffany Drew, Cara Ellis, Cynthia Feliks, Jennifer Furminger, Inga Hall, Helen Hallmark, Tanya Holyk, Sherry Irving, Angela Jardine, Patricia Johnson, Debra Jones, Kerry Koski, Jacqueline McDonell, Diana Melnick, and Dianne Rock. In addition, DNA from six other Missing Women – Sharon Abraham, Yvonne Boen, Nancy Clark, Dawn Crey, Stephanie Lane, and Jacqueline Murdock – was allegedly found on the Pickton property, but there was insufficient evidence for Crown to approve charges. By any measure, the deaths of these Missing Women was a heart-wrenching tragedy, and one which has many lessons.

Significant improvements have been made in the VPD and in policing in BC since the Missing Women investigation. All of the VPD-relevant recommendations flowing from the Review have been implemented. Supervisors and managers of investigative squads are required to have an appropriate level of investigative experience and receive major case management training. The Inspectors in charge of the three VPD sections that focus on violent crime are all former major crime investigators and supervisors, and all have major case management training. Both the Superintendent and Deputy Chief who oversee major investigations are experienced investigators and investigative supervisors. Since the Missing Women investigation, six VPD officers have been provincially accredited as Major Case Management Team Commanders. The current Executive has implemented a system in which it is briefed daily on current cases, and is proactive in ensuring it is fully informed and engaged so that it can fulfill its leadership responsibilities. All major case and task force investigations are guided by major case management protocols, including staffing matters and media strategies.

In terms of VPD staffing levels, since the Missing Women investigation, the VPD has received extraordinary support from the City of Vancouver and Vancouver City Council in increasing both sworn and civilian staffing. Sworn staffing has been effectively increased by 243 positions since 2003, while civilian staffing has increased by well over 100 positions over the same time period. Many of the civilian positions are crime analysts, which were severely lacking during the Missing Women investigation.

The VPD has also continued to work at improving relationships with sex trade workers and other marginalized persons via advocacy groups, and has assigned a police officer who is well-respected in the Downtown Eastside, Constable Linda Malcolm, as a full-time sex trade worker liaison.

There have been many improvements in the ability of police in the Lower Mainland to respond to multi-jurisdictional crime, as evidenced by the creation of RCMP-led integrated units such as the Integrated Gang Task Force. To their credit, the Provincial Government has significantly increased funding for such integrated units, expanding the overall policing capacity in the Lower Mainland and elsewhere. In addition, the Province has funded and implemented province-wide the Police Records Information Management Environment (PRIME) System that the VPD introduced in 2001, so that all police agencies are able to efficiently share information. In addition, major case management training has continued and its principles have become the accepted standard for the conduct of major investigations in B.C.

As noted, a provincial missing persons analysis unit has now been in place since 2005, although more work is needed to ensure it addresses the current gaps in missing persons investigations, particularly when there are multi-jurisdictional issues, and also with respect to barriers to reporting, particularly for marginalized persons.

There are, however, still some outstanding challenges that played a role in the failures in the Missing Women investigation. For example, there is still no provincial standard for electronic case management software to support major investigations and different agencies are using different applications. The VPD continues to advocate

for such a system, as its lack prevents seamless multi-jurisdictional investigations, delays the transfer of information, and requires that investigators who move to a multi-jurisdictional unit from a different agency have to adapt to new systems. There should also be more attention paid to provincial standards for training. Some progress in this regard was made in 2008, but there is more work to do.

In addition, the lack of a regional police force in the Lower Mainland means that there are competing priorities, and decisions on regional issues are delayed while consensus is sought. While the level of cooperation is usually good among police leaders in the province, this situation would be enhanced with a better structure that would support police decision-making on a regional basis, rather than the fragmented system that exists now, and which played a key negative role in the Missing Women investigation. There are times when decision-making on major multi-jurisdictional policing issues must rest with a clear governance and executive authority, supported by a unified and accountable management team. In major multi-jurisdictional cases, decisions must not be diluted or avoided because of a lack of an appropriate structure to support such decision making. While a “Joint Management Team” approach has been adopted in BC to support some integrated units, this approach does not set out a legal or practical basis for strong, rapid, and accountable decision-making that incorporates the issues of the major stakeholders. This problem should be examined by the Ministry of Solicitor General.



VANCOUVER POLICE DEPARTMENT
Beyond the Call