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**Comparison of missing person files as
completed in 1997/1998 and 2010 as
compiled by the Missing Women Inquiry**

Prepared by: Insp. John Craig, Investigative Services Division

Missing Person Protocols- 1997/1998

Acceptance of MP Reports

In 1997/1998, the Victoria Police Department (“Victoria PD”) accepted MP reports. It did so pursuant to its written mandate or policy to accept and/or investigate MP reports. From reviewing its files, the Victoria Police department’s best estimate is that it received 281 MP reports in 1997 and 265 in 1998.

Reports were received through the Communication Centre or by Patrol. The MP’s name, date of birth, address, history, clothing description, friends and family, who last observed the MP and where the MP was observed, and where the MP might go was recorded in the report. A recent picture of the MP was also obtained. This information was recorded in hardcopy.

There were no restrictions regarding who could report a person missing.

There were restrictions on how long a person had to be missing before a report was taken. While there was no set restriction, a 24 hour timeline was used in discussion with reportees when there were no reasons to believe anything suspicious had occurred; in many cases, the reportee was encouraged to wait 24 hours before calling back.

The Victoria PD had jurisdictional restrictions in 1997/1998: MP reports were made to the police jurisdiction where the person resided. The issue of jurisdiction was complicated because there were five municipal police departments and several RCMP detachments in the Greater Victoria area.

Resources and Organization

The Victoria PD did not have a dedicated MPU in 1997/1998. Patrol officers completed the initial investigation and, when Patrol officers were unsuccessful in finding MPs, a single officer from the Detective Office, the MP Coordinator, conducted follow-up investigations.

The MP Coordinator was dedicated to MP and domestic follow-up investigations, spending approximately 40% of his or her time on MP files and 60% on domestic files. The dedicated MP and domestic officer system was likely established around 1996. This position was part time and often filled with more transient light duty employees and others who did not have significant experience in investigations.

Priority and Investigation

After receipt of an MP report, the Victoria PD had routinely followed investigative procedures.

A Patrol officer conducted the initial investigation. The Patrol officer followed up with relatives, family members and those who saw the MP last and conducted an investigation to determine why the MP went missing, where he or she might have been, and whether anything suspicious was involved.

If the MP was still missing after a couple of days or Patrol's investigation reached an impasse, the dedicated MP investigator was tasked with the follow-up investigation.

The Victoria PD had a system in place for assessing MP reports and prioritized categories of adult MPs. The Patrol Staff Sergeant of the shift that received an MP file assessed the file and determined its priority, based on the vulnerability of the MP. Further assessment of the file was done through file review on RMS.

Files with additional priority were referred to the Detective Office more quickly and files with suspicious or unique circumstances were assigned additional resources.

Whether an MP was a woman, a sex trade worker or a drug addict had no effect on the acceptance or investigation of the report. If the MP had a history of going missing or was transient or believed to be of no fixed address, the Victoria PD was somewhat less likely to accept or investigate the report.

That said, investigations depended on the MP's circumstances or situation. If the MP was a sex trade worker, the Victoria PD was more likely to investigate if there were suspicious circumstances; however, if there was nothing suspicious about the disappearance and it was believed she moved to another stroll, the Victoria PD was less likely to investigate. Similarly, if a person was of no fixed address or had a history of moving frequently, the Victoria PD may have waited for more information rather than actively investigate. At the time, there was also an issue of chronic runaways: reporting agencies commonly knew where the person was but reported the person missing for policy reasons.

Investigative steps were documented on a written occurrence report. Recorded in the report were the five "W"s and the steps completed to determine the circumstances associated with the MP's disappearance and to locate the MP.

Referral, Review and Closing

There was a relationship between the MP Coordinator and other units. Specifically, the MP Coordinator was co-located with the Homicide and Major Crimes Units, all overseen by the same Staff Sergeant.

An MP file was forwarded to other units, absent a crime scene, if the MP was not located in a timely manner, the MP investigation was beyond Patrol's ability, or unique or suspicious circumstances existed. Patrol and Detective divisions consulted on MP files.

The Victoria PD used inter-jurisdictional resources in its MP investigations: MPs were listed on CPIC and the Department's RMS; if the MP was believed to be in another jurisdiction, a request was sent to that jurisdiction; and if there was a reason to believe an MP was at risk, a CPIC fan out was sent to all agencies in the region.

The Victoria PD also used non-police resources when it was necessary and would be of assistance on a file, or if the MP had associations to specific non-police resources such as community or government resources.

Outstanding MP files were regularly reviewed by the assigned investigator; however, while the reviews were supposed to be regular they were often missed for several months.

MP files were closed when the MP was located. The Staff Sergeant on shift or in the Detective Office, depending on where the file was assigned, reviewed the file and authorized its closure.

Communication

The Patrol officer liaised with the reportee and family during the initial phase of the investigation. As the investigation progressed, the assigned MP investigator acted as liaison.

The Victoria PD's procedures involved regular communication with reportees and family members but contact was not scheduled. At the beginning of an investigation, communication was regular; as the file continued, contact was occasional to see if the MP had returned and to respond to the family's inquiries.

Missing Person Protocol 2013

Acceptance of MP Reports

The Victoria PD accepts MP reports. In 2010 it received 469 MP reports, in 2011, 398 were received and in 2012, 376 reports were made.

MP reports are currently received and opened by the Communications Centre or Patrol.

Each MP file records

- the five "W"s;
- facts related to the MP's disappearance;
- the MP's name, physical description, identifiers, date of birth, clothing, friends, places he or she might go and social media sites;
- a recent picture of the MP;
- an assessment of the scene where the MP was last seen;
- any investigative steps to be taken;
- interviews of parents and friends; and
- resources sought or used.

The MP file is recorded online on PRIME.

The acceptance of MP files has changed since 1998. There are currently jurisdictional restrictions regarding the acceptance of MP reports. The jurisdiction of an MP file within the CRD is determined with reference to where the MP resides, not where they were last seen as in the Provincial Missing Person policy. This policy was last revised in September 2011.

There are no time restrictions for reporting a person missing: the Victoria PD states that no specific period of time must elapse before reporting. This has changed since 1998 when an informal 24 hour policy was often used.

There continues to be no restrictions regarding who can report a person missing.

All of the identified factors have no effect on the acceptance of MP reports. All MP reports are accepted.

Resources and Organization

The Victoria PD has a dedicated MPU. This was not the case in 1998. Now, one member of the Investigative Services Division, Major Crimes Section is assigned the MP Coordinator role and is responsible for oversight of all MP files, reviewing them and ensuring they have the resources they require.

The MP Investigator spends five hours per week, approximately 20% of his time, on MP files: he has other work assignments in addition to his MP responsibilities. Every day of his four-day work week he reviews MP files on PRIME to ensure investigations are properly conducted and investigative steps set out in the policy are completed by the assigned officers. He becomes involved in a file if extra resources are required.

Staffing for MPs has changed since 1998: the MP portfolio is now more involved and the standard of investigation, as set out in policy, is far higher. The MP Investigator more actively oversees and coordinates MP files.

Priority and Investigation

The written policy for accepting and investigating MP reports has changed since 1998. The current policy provides more details and sets out specific and stricter requirements regarding timelines, including timelines for data entry and certain checks, thoroughness and resources to be used.

Compared to 1998, investigations are broader, done at a higher level and assigned more resources. The protocol for initial Patrol investigations includes procedures for passing files onto the next shift and the active oversight of NCOs. Searches done on receipt of an MP report are more involved than in 1998, follow up is completed in a timely manner and oversight by the MP Investigator is more frequent.

Investigations of MP files have evolved with other investigations. Furthermore, the Victoria PD recognizes that MP files can have tragic results. It therefore tries to ensure positive results with quicker investigations.

A member is dispatched to each MP file, assigned immediately to investigate and follow up with the reportee to collect details. The NCO conducts an assessment, including an assessment of the need for a search, and makes all necessary resources available as soon as possible. Searches are conducted immediately and CPIC entries are completed along with PRIME file documentation.

Patrol officers investigate MP files until they can no longer carry the investigation or it is determined that Investigative Services are required. In conducting oversight, the MP Investigator can speak to the Investigative Services Staff Sergeant to determine if the involvement of other sections is needed. The Analysis and Intelligence Section is also frequently involved in MP files.

The Victoria PD has a system for assessing MP reports set out in its policy. Priority is assessed using a variety of factors, including whether the MP is a vulnerable individual, is from a high risk group or has disabilities or medical conditions. For example, the Victoria PD's policy states that children and vulnerable individuals should be considered a priority; this change occurred as a result of the department's recognition that MP files need a higher level of assessment than previously conducted.

All of the identified factors have no effect on the investigation of MP reports. The policy sets out the protocol for investigation: files are prioritized differently based on what the circumstances dictate. The Victoria PD recognizes that MP files of vulnerable people and people from high risk groups must be prioritized above files of chronic runaways whose circumstances do not indicate a higher risk.

Documentation standards are also higher than in 1998. All investigative steps taken, information received, reasons for decisions made and resources sought and used are recorded in PRIME on Occurrence Reports. PRIME reports are immediately accessible to all police agencies in BC.

Referral, Review and Closing

There is a relationship or interaction between the MP Investigator and other units and there are circumstances absent a crime scene when a MP file will be transferred. The MP Investigator is a part of the Investigative Services Division and interacts with the Analysis and Intelligence Section frequently in relation to the MP files. The MP Investigator can discuss files with the Staff Sergeant in Investigative Services and determine if other sections need to be involved. MP files are transferred if anything stands out as requiring inquiry or investigation beyond the ability of Patrol members.

The MP Investigator reviews outstanding MP files daily during his four day work week. If he is away, another officer is assigned the task. A review of outstanding files is completed annually.

The current standard of review is much higher than the standard in 1998: before, files may not have been actively reviewed for weeks at a time. Current oversight is more regular to ensure investigations are conducted expeditiously.

MP files are closed by members in consultation with the NCOs and under the authorization of the Staff Sergeant of either Patrol or Investigative Services during file review. The MP Coordinator is responsible for oversight of file closure. File closure was conducted similarly in 1998 but current standards are higher. This demonstrates more scrutiny of MP files, particularly those with higher risk assessments.

Communication

The Victoria PD's procedures involve regular communication with the reportee and family members. Assigned members liaise with the reportee and family members. Patrol members follow up with the family and provide contact numbers.

Communication is more frequent now than in 1998: there is a better understanding that MP files need to be investigated quickly and thoroughly and that communication with reportees and families is a part of the process. As a result, assigned members are expected to have contact with reportees and families and provide updates as needed.



Missing Person Investigations: Identified Areas of Concern

Prepared by: Insp. John Craig, Investigative Services Division

Areas of Concern

- **Multi-jurisdictional issues - who takes the file?**
The Victoria Police departments missing person policy clearly sets out that all missing persons will be investigated by the police agency where the missing person resides. This policy is consistent with other Greater Victoria police agencies. All police agencies share information where appropriate and assist each other as necessary with investigations.
- **Use of media in missing person investigations**
- **Police did not use the media to tap into community networks**
The Victoria Police have an engaged Public Affairs section that is involved with the media on a daily basis. The media are utilized to support investigative efforts in missing person files on a regular basis.
- **Risk Assessment- failure to provide resources, failure to investigate rather than review, failure to fully investigate suspects, failure to incorporate proactive measures.**
- **Police did not investigate tips to their conclusion**

The way missing persons files are dealt with in 2013 is much different than in 1998. While all initial reports of missing persons are taken by communications staff or patrol officers, there is an enhanced understanding of the need to quickly and accurately assess the need for additional resources. A patrol officer is dispatched to all missing person files. If based on the assessed risk or circumstances known, there is a need for additional resources, the Investigative Services Division (ISD) is contacted and assume control of the investigation. This allows for a more comprehensive assessment of the situation and application of wide ranging resources where appropriate.

Police gather a large amount of information at the onset of receiving a missing person report, starting immediately upon receiving a report of a missing person. Interviews with friends, family and co-workers are begun as soon as possible and leads are followed to their conclusion, including fully investigating potential suspects. Proactive measures such as the use of the media to broadcast the details of the situation and picture of the missing person, use of social media and our department website, and reaching out to people in the community through relationships that have been built and maintained, are all utilized to assist in the location of the missing person.

If a missing person's file is deemed suspicious or has not been resolved in a short period of time, the ISD will become involved in the investigation. Where this occurs, Major Case Management (MCM) principles are applied, all information is recorded and tasks are assigned to investigators to complete. All tasks are documented, followed to their conclusion and overseen through this systematic approach.

- **Systematic bias toward women who went missing from the DTES.**
- **Sex Trade Liaison Officer- recommended**
- **Need-reorientation of policing - develop and maintain relationships**

The Victoria Police recognize that some people in our community are living in situations that may make them more vulnerable to violence than others. Women working in the sex trade and people who are marginalized because of their living situation, mental health or addiction issues make up two of these groups. The Victoria Police missing person policy specifically recognizes vulnerable populations and specifies an enhanced response to reports of missing persons from these groups.

The Victoria Police Department has a number of programs underway to build relationships between police and members of these groups. The Special Victim's Unit works closely with PEERS (Prostitutes Empowerment Education and Recovery Society) to ensure there is a good exchange of information between the police and the Sex Trade Workers (STW's) in Victoria. A great deal of work has been done to ensure STW's feel safe and confident reporting suspicious or criminal activities to police. A proactive program of contacting people in the sex trade or other marginalized groups has been undertaken to build strong trusting relationships with police. The recommendation of a sex trade liaison officer was specific to the Vancouver Police; however, recognizing Victoria has a smaller but significant sex trade, the Special Victim's Unit has taken a proactive role in this area.

Our Focused Enforcement Team (FET) has worked hard to target problem people in the marginalized communities and work with those who need assistance and help to rise above the circumstances they are in. The Victoria Integrated Community Outreach Team (VICOT) officer works closely with the FET members and Community Response Officers (CRO's) to identify and work with individuals who require more supervision or intensive care. The Mobile Youth Services Team (MYST) position also offers opportunities to open channels of communication between vulnerable sexually exploited youth and police.

Missing person files involving people from these groups are dealt with the same way as any other missing person investigation. However, given the added vulnerability of many of these individuals' situations, they often have a higher risk assessed and therefore, more resources are dedicated to these files from the start.

- **Lack of leadership**
 - **Failure to recognize and take ownership of problem**
 - **Passive management style**
 - **Lack of communication between investigators and SM**
 - **Failure by SM to keep informed**
 - **Absence of supervisors at critical times**
 - **Lack of oversight and direction by SM**
 - **Overall lack of engagement and commitment by SM**

- **Use of MCM for major crimes**
- **Need to break down hierarchical nature of police agencies and facilitate communication and collaboration.**

The Victoria Police Department is relatively small at 243 members, in comparison to the Vancouver Police and the RCMP in BC. Many of the issues identified relating to communication breakdowns between investigators and Senior Managers are overcome by the direct involvement of the Inspector of ISD in the oversight of investigations and the regular reporting to the Deputy Chief and Chief level.

All areas of the Victoria Police Department regularly work together on files and there are good communication mechanisms in place to ensure the transfer of information. The Analysis and Intelligence Section (AIS) holds a weekly meeting of the Operations Council where members from all areas of the department attend to exchange information and identify priorities for the department. The OIC's, Staff Sergeants and Sergeants have open lines of communication throughout the department and this assists with files being assessed for additional resources where necessary.

The Victoria Police ISD members have direct lines of communication to their supervisors and the OIC of the Division. The Staff Sergeant and other supervisors in the division actively review the work being done and ensure the best practices are being followed. Where the MCM model is utilized, the command triangle (team commander, file coordinator and primary investigator) oversee the investigation and work together with the Staff Sergeant or OIC to ensure the investigation is completed in a comprehensive manner. Where issues are identified, they are dealt with immediately. Regular division meetings are held and all members of the investigative teams are encouraged to bring ideas and concerns forward to their supervisors.

- **Five limitations in policing systems and approaches contributed to failed investigation.**
 1. **Inadequate missing person policy and practices**
 2. **Slow adoption of MCM systems**
 3. **A silo based approach to policing**
 4. **Failure to develop and apply policing standards**
 5. **Poor or non-existent integration of community based approaches.**
- **Lack of standards related to missing person investigations**

The Victoria Police policies are evaluated and updated regularly. The last update for the missing person policy was Sept 2011.

Adoption of MCM systems occur once the file has been initially assessed and deemed to be a suspicious occurrence or major crime. The ISD members will make the decision to

enact the MCM principles on a case by case basis, but where it is deemed necessary, it occurs quickly.

The Greater Victoria police agencies continue to operate individually. However, there are good working relationships built between the departments and where necessary, assistance is requested from other agencies. All police departments in BC are mandated to utilize the PRIME records management system and this allows other area agencies to obtain details of investigations from neighboring departments.

The Victoria Police Department has obtained information from the BC Police Missing Person Unit (RCMP), the Vancouver Police Department, the Canadian Center for Information on Missing Adults, and the RCMP National Center for Missing Persons and Unidentified Remains- Best Practices, to ensure that missing person investigations are completed to a high standard and best practices are implemented and followed. Current standards of investigation for missing person files are significantly higher than in 1998.

- **Transparency and communication through public dissemination of reports, mechanisms for the public to request police service, creation of forums for discussion of crime and safety issues and community based policing.**

The Victoria Police Department has been a leader in these areas. The introduction of Crime Reports, on-line reporting, use of multiple social media tools, dissemination of reports through the website and media briefings, town hall style meetings with community groups, a thriving Block Watch program and other community based programs and a re-development of the department website in the last year have all contributed to openness and transparency. The OIC of FET is a member of the Downtown Service Providers and participates in regular meetings where ideas are exchanged and issues are discussed.

- **Voluntary registration/warning program and protocol to be developed in consultation with vulnerable women. Voluntary DNA database could be part of the program.**

The Victoria Police Special Victim's Unit has been working to enhance the working relationship with PEERS. This group acts as an advocacy group for the sex trade workers in Victoria and already has an established registration and warning system in place.

- **Supporting and communication with reportees / victim families**

Over the last number of years communication with reportees and victim's families has been recognized as an important part of the police role in missing person investigations. Regular contact with the family or reportee is now a vital step in these investigations.

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- **Failure to review missing persons cases regularly.**

The vast majority of all missing person cases are resolved within a few days. A small number continue on for a few weeks and an even smaller number remain unsolved. All missing person files that are being actively investigated are reviewed regularly to ensure all possibilities are explored and eliminated.