

Making a Difference: Lil' Red Dress Project

A January 2020 article, "On Vancouver Island, Beaders Find a Way to Search for Missing Indigenous Women", by Andrea Smith describes how two Indigenous women on Vancouver Island used beading skills to raise money for missing Indigenous women. They volunteered their time and talent by making and selling beaded red dress pins and earrings. Profits obtained from the sales were used to purchase advertising space on billboards to display photos of local missing women.

These artists called this the Lil' Red Dress Project because the red dress is a symbol of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG). The artists began selling their products in 2018, and were eventually able to raise \$15,000, which was enough to purchase two billboards for two missing Indigenous women from the Vancouver Island area.

The billboards were intended to help find the missing women, reach someone who may have information about them, and raise awareness about the bigger issue of MMIWG. People who purchased and wore the jewelry also helped raise awareness by informing people of the symbolism of the red dress and why this issue should concern us all.

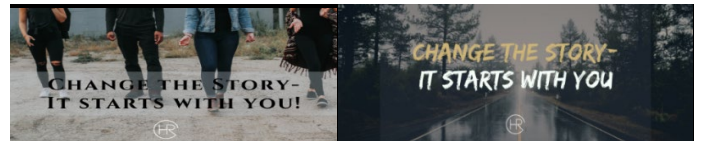
This is an inspiring example of how passionate individuals can start a grassroots movement and make a positive difference in their community. (Article based on the story reported by Andrea Smith from [TheTye](#), and used with permission.)



Photo via the Lil' Red Dress Project (used with permission and retrieved from [TheTye](#)).

A Safe Home Opens in Saskatoon: November 2019

Hope Restored Canada (HRC) is a charity that seeks to end human trafficking and sexual exploitation, a cause closely related to missing persons. As their name implies, HRC offers hope for victims and their families. They began their work in 2017 and are based out of Saskatoon. In November 2019, HRC established a safe house attached to programming in Saskatoon.



This house is a shelter for women who have been victims of trafficking and exploitation and could benefit from a supportive community on their road to recovery. HRC approaches the issues of sexual exploitation and trafficking with a model of H.O.P.E. That is, **H**olistic restoration, **O**utreach, **P**artnership, and **E**ducation.

- The holistic restoration dimension includes supports such as recovery programs, support groups, mentorship, housing, and case planning.
- The outreach dimension includes a 24/7 hotline called Lilies of Liberty: 1-833-283-SAFE (7233), referral services, and assistance in establishing social supports and exit strategies.
- The partnership dimension involves maintaining relationships with other organizations, service providers, funders, and members.
- The education dimension involves raising public awareness of sexual exploitation and trafficking through educational sessions and training for service providers.

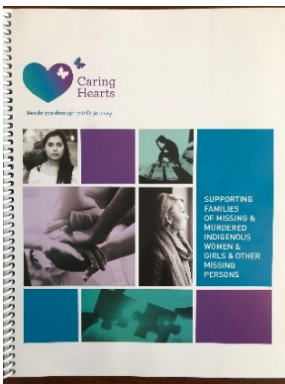
If you want to help, Hope Restored accepts monetary donations and seeks funding for special projects for their programs and safe house. They also have opportunities to volunteer in various ways. For example, youth can participate in a fundraiser called "[Skip for Hope](#)" to learn about the impacts of trafficking and exploitation, and to support those affected.

The [HRC website](#) features articles, videos, and personal stories about exploitation and trafficking, and how they impact individuals, families, and communities.

Ambiguous Loss: A Loss Unlike Any Other

Ambiguous loss is best described as a type of loss that is filled with unanswered questions and uncertainty. According to Caring Hearts, an education and counselling organization specializing in ambiguous loss,

...(it) occurs when someone is physically absent but psychologically present. It is an unclear loss that resists closure or understanding. It leaves one searching for answers and thus complicates and delays the process of grieving, and often results in unresolved grief.



When someone goes missing it is a loss unlike any other kind of loss. There is much uncertainty and many unanswered questions surrounding the situation. Families feel like they are stuck in a constant battle between hope and despair. They cannot mourn or grieve because they do not know what has happened to

their loved one. This leaves people in a constant state of worry and anxiety. The less that is known about the situation the more anxiety, depression, and internal conflict is felt.

There are many important things to consider when working with the families of the missing and addressing ambiguous loss. For example, Caring Hearts Director of Education, Dwayne Yasinowski, notes using the word 'closure' may be inappropriate as family members may perceive it to imply that the loss is over and the missing person is deceased.

Duane Bowers, a contract worker for Caring Hearts, notes that those supporting families should not use the words 'grief' or 'loss,' as these words are related to death and may trigger people. However, words such as 'missing' and 'absence' are acceptable. Bowers and Yasinowski also note the importance of using the present tense when discussing missing persons, since using past tense implies their passing. In addition, being trauma-informed, eliminating 'power over' relationships, and establishing trusting and safe relationships are all key to providing meaningful support.

Caring Hearts has several resources and services that deal with ambiguous loss. They offer a province-wide missing persons counselling program where a clinical counsellor will travel to the community of the person requesting support. Families can also request support from an Elder instead of a clinical counsellor, and there is the option to do counselling over the phone or Skype.

They currently offer sharing circles for families of MMIWG in Prince Albert and Regina, and may be expanding to Yorkton and North Battleford soon. Additionally, Caring Hearts will have missing persons support groups beginning in fall 2020 in Regina, Yorkton, and Saskatoon. With the support of the provincial and federal governments, Caring Hearts is able to offer these direct supports to individuals and families at no charge.

Caring Hearts offers a webinar entitled "Ambiguous Loss," as well as a manual entitled "Supporting Families of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls and other Missing Persons." These were both produced by Duane Bowers and can be accessed through Dwayne Yasinowski of Caring Hearts. They also offer province-wide training sessions for front line workers, volunteers, and Elders. These sessions focus on ambiguous loss, trauma-informed care/awareness, understanding trauma, secondary trauma, and the importance of self-care and resiliency building.

Note: there is another type of ambiguous loss where the person is physically present but psychologically absent. This occurs with individuals with dementia or Alzheimer's. Caring Hearts does not provide services for this type of ambiguous loss, but the PPCMP's partners at the Alzheimer's Society of Saskatchewan would have more information on this topic. In addition, since those with Alzheimer's are at risk of going missing, their loved ones are at risk of experiencing both kinds of ambiguous loss.



- **Submitted by Elise Paquin, Practicum Student, University of Regina Social Work Faculty**

Missing Persons Liaisons

The Missing Persons Liaison (MPL) Programs began in January 2012 and were created to address the unique needs of those with missing loved ones. The three MPL programs are located within the victim services units in the Prince Albert Police Service, Regina Police Service and Saskatoon Police Service. The MPLs provide practical and emotional support to families of missing persons within their respective service areas. They also provide consultation services to all victim services units within Saskatchewan so all Saskatchewan families can receive supports.

Attempting to navigate the world of missing persons is incredibly stressful and emotional and can be overwhelming. MPLs and victim services support workers can provide families with information such as investigation updates, access to specialized counselling, federal grant applications for certain kinds of financial support, and information about legislation and estates. Most importantly, MPLs and victim services support workers are there to listen to the hopes, fears, concerns and stories that families need to express in a safe and caring environment.

The MPLs know and understand that families worry their loved ones will be forgotten and they can feel like they are walking this experience alone. We want our families to know, ***you are not alone***. We invite anyone who may have a missing loved one to contact their local police-based victim services program for more information on what assistance is available to them as they navigate this extremely difficult journey.

In July 2018, Rhonda Fiddler, Regina MPL, came up with the idea and design for the hope pin. Rhonda gives the pin out to any family member she comes in contact with who has a missing person. Rhonda estimates that at least 200 pins have been distributed in Saskatchewan to families and victim services staff who attend the Missing Persons Training. The hope pin is both a powerful symbol and a reflective way to raise awareness.



The Hope Pin

The **hope** pin was designed specially for families of missing persons so they could have a wearable symbol to represent themselves, their journey and their missing loved one.

The subtle silver colouring doesn't stand out, so families can wear it and not have to worry that their trauma is seen by the world.

The raised letters allow a person to run their fingers over the word **hope** which bring comfort to many families especially when facing stressful situations.

The ribbon design was chosen for the importance of public awareness of the unique needs of families of missing persons.

- ***Submitted by Rhonda Fiddler, Missing Persons Liaison, Regina Police Service***

RCMP and New York Art Academy

The RCMP operates the National Centre for Missing Persons and Unidentified Remains. There are currently “over 700 unidentified remains” in this database. A collaboration between the RCMP and an art school in New York aims to identify some of these remains. The New York Art Academy held a sculpture workshop to reconstruct the faces of 15 of the unidentified people. Using human skulls from the RCMP, the National Research Council printed 3D versions of them, which the art students molded with clay to depict the facial characteristics of the deceased. These reconstructed faces can be viewed on the Government of Canada’s website. **Warning:** these lifelike faces may trigger a trauma response for some people.



Photograph submitted by Cpl. Charity Sampson

Besides being available for viewing on the website, the RCMP posted some faces on their social media networks in the hopes of reaching more people. All of the reconstructed faces are males discovered in British Columbia between 1972 and 2019. The RCMP said they are hoping to hold similar workshops in Canada in the future to reconstruct more faces and identify more of the unidentified remains.

While identifying these faces will resolve some cases, many unanswered questions remain. After discovering their missing loved one is deceased, people will still struggle with ambiguous loss. They may never know what happened, where the person passed away, why, or how. Therefore, avoid using the word “closure” with a family member, or assuming that identifying a loved one ends a family’s grief. This project is a useful and creative way to combine science and art to help solve crime. However, we must be mindful that this could be traumatizing for those who have experienced or are experiencing this kind of loss.

Supports for Families

The following list is not exhaustive—there are many other agencies that provide various types of supports to families of missing persons. In addition, friends, family, coworkers, faith groups, and communities are very important informal supports.

[The Alzheimer Society of Saskatchewan](#) provides supports to people living with dementia, as well as their families. Individuals with dementia are particularly at risk of going missing. The Alzheimer Society partners with MedicAlert to offer the [MedicAlert](#) Safely Home service, which helps identify and locate individuals who are lost or missing due to dementia.

Canadian Centre for Child Protection operates [MissingKids.ca](#), a website dedicated to supporting families, offering information and resources, and partnering with police and other agencies searching for missing children.

[Caring Hearts](#) supports families of missing persons by offering individual and group counselling, with both clinical and traditional healing options. They also facilitate support groups for families of missing persons, webinars on ambiguous loss, and other educational resources for families and frontline workers.

[Child Find Saskatchewan](#) supports families of missing children by connecting them to peer networks that provide emotional supports. They also work with law enforcement and other agencies to gather and distribute information on missing children’s cases.

[Crime Stoppers Saskatchewan](#) provides indirect support to families of missing persons by helping solve cases by encouraging the public to submit tips. For example, the recent “To Those Who Took the Missing” campaign encourages people to submit tips or self-report on missing persons’ cases.

[Family Information Liaison Units \(FILU\)](#) support families of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls. They help answer families’ questions, access information, and liaise between the family and the investigative team.

[Missing Children Society of Canada](#) operates across the country and provides families with informal resources,

information, and connections to other agencies.

Police (RCMP, city police, etc.) should be the first point of contact for families of missing persons. There are other police-based supports, such as the Missing Persons Liaisons (MPLs) through Victim Services. For more information, please view the Missing Persons Liaisons [pamphlet](#).

Safer Communities and Neighborhoods (SCAN) responds to reports of suspicious or illegal activity, which could include prostitution, human trafficking, or other criminal activities that could involve missing persons. SCAN operates investigation units in Regina and Saskatoon.

Saskatchewan Aboriginal Women's Circle Corporation supports and advocates for Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. Past campaigns include

Sisters in Spirit, which sought to honour and respect the missing and murdered women.

Saskatchewan Ministry of Justice provides information and materials for families of missing persons on their website. They also fund projects, lead initiatives, and support the Provincial Partnership Committee on Missing Persons.

211 Saskatchewan can connect families to both informal and formal supports in their community. Families may not know exactly what is offered or available to them, and so 211 can be a big help during an overwhelming time. Families or agencies can call or text 2-1-1, or head to sk.211.ca to connect with someone from 211 by web chat or search the site for resources themselves.

- **Submitted by Elise Paquin, Practicum Student, University of Regina Social Work Faculty**

Appendix: Website URLs

Alzheimer Society of Saskatchewan: <https://alzheimer.ca/en/sk>

Canada's Missing: <https://canadasmising.ca/index-eng.htm>

Caring Hearts: <https://www.caringheartssk.ca>

Child Find Saskatchewan: <https://www.childfind.sk.ca/>

Crime Stoppers Saskatchewan: <https://saskcrimestoppers.com/>

Family Information Liaison Unit: <https://www.saskatchewan.ca/residents/family-and-social-support/help-for-families-of-missing-or-murdered-persons>

Hope Restored Canada (HRC): <https://www.hoperestoredcanada.org/>

Mall, Rattan, January 13, 2020, The Indo-Canadian Voice, One Community-One Voice; BC Coroners Service Engaged in Skull Reconstruction to Help Close Cold Cases: <https://www.voiceonline.com/bc-coroners-service-engaged-in-skull-reconstruction-to-help-close-cold-cases/>

Medic Alert Safely Home: <https://www.medicalert.ca/safely-home>

Missing Children Society of Canada: <https://mcsc.ca/>

Missing Persons Liaison Victims Services Pamphlet:

https://www.sacp.ca/uploads/1/2/4/0/124002851/mpl_pamphlet_1.pdf

Safer Communities and Neighborhoods (SCAN): <https://www.saskatchewan.ca/residents/justice-crime-and-the-law/your-rights-and-the-law/keeping-your-neighbourhood-safe>

Saskatchewan Aboriginal Women's Circle Corporation: <https://sawcc-nwac.ca/>

Saskatchewan Association of Chiefs of Police website: <https://www.sacp.ca/>

Saskatchewan Ministry of Justice: <https://www.saskatchewan.ca/residents/family-and-social-support/help-for-families-of-missing-or-murdered-persons>

Smith, Andrea, January 21, 2020, The Tye: On Vancouver Island, Beaders Find a Way to Aid Search for Missing Indigenous Women: <https://thetye.ca/News/2020/01/21/Beaders-Help-Fund-Billboards/>

211 Saskatchewan: <http://sk.211.ca/>

For more information on the Provincial Partnership Committee on Missing Persons, contact:

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