

Report on the 2011 Western Regional Forum on Supporting Families of Missing Persons

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Executive Summary

The Western Regional Forum on Supporting Families of Missing Persons was held at the Ramada Hotel in Regina, Saskatchewan on March 2 – 3, 2011. This Forum was attended by approximately 60 individuals who were invited as representatives of a range of agencies across western Canada [Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta, British Columbia, Yukon and Northwest Territories] and included federal participation from Justice Canada and Public Safety Canada. Participants who attended the Forum included: victims services workers, law enforcement officers, Crown Counsel, other criminal justice employees, community-based organization workers, First Nations, Métis and Aboriginal organizations and government representatives.

The Forum was hosted by Child Find Saskatchewan, a member of Saskatchewan's Provincial Partnership Committee on Missing Persons. Justice Canada was the primary sponsor along with a financial contribution from Saskatchewan's Ministry of First Nations and Métis Relations, and in-kind support from the Ministries of Justice and Attorney General and Corrections, Public Safety and Policing. Members of the Saskatchewan Provincial Partnership Committee on Missing Persons and Child Find Saskatchewan organized the event. Government officials from British Columbia, Alberta, Manitoba, the Northwest Territories and the Yukon participated in selecting invitees and presenters.

This forum focused on three broad objectives:

- 1. To increase awareness of the victim supports needed and the services and responses available to assist families of missing persons and to start a dialogue on how to link services across jurisdictions;*
- 2. To encourage governmental and non-governmental organizations to clearly identify the common and unique needs of families of missing persons as well as current gaps in services to families of missing persons; and*
- 3. To encourage discussion on the development of a more coherent regional approach to provide both short-term and long-term support and assistance to families of missing persons.*

Derived from the above objectives, the forum sought to answer the following three questions:

- What do families need in both the short and long term when they are facing a missing person's situation?*
- How are jurisdictions currently meeting those needs and are there areas where significant gaps remain?*

- *How can agency responses and services provided to families of missing persons be improved both within jurisdictions as well as across jurisdictions?*

This document provides general information about missing persons issues in Canada as well as more specific information regarding issues in western regions. This information is followed by a synopsis of the Western Regional Forum on Supporting Families of Missing Persons, including resulting outcomes and recommendations.

Missing Persons in Canada

Imagine how you would feel if your parent, relative, grandparent, sibling, child, or friend was missing. What thoughts would race through your mind? Who could you turn to for help? What actions and steps would you take?

Sadly, many Canadian families are faced with these questions and must deal with the frightening reality of these situations. A 2005 consultation report released by Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness Canada noted that there are more than 100,000 reports of missing persons in Canada each year. From this total, approximately 4,800 persons are still missing after a year passes. There is also an average increase of 270 new, long-term missing persons annually.¹

Having someone go missing can have many negative effects on families, friends and communities as they deal with unanswered questions and an uncertain future while struggling to maintain and preserve hope that their loved one will be found.

Issues in Western Canada

The subject of missing persons is of particular concern in western Canadian provinces as a high percentage of individuals who go missing are from this region. Some cities and provinces have started to develop missing persons databases in order to obtain a more accurate picture of who is missing from western Canadian provinces. According to the Saskatchewan Association of Chiefs of Police website, there are currently 105 missing persons from Saskatchewan as well as 10 sets of unidentified human remains.² Alberta's Missing Persons and Unidentified Human Remains online database records that there are presently 198 missing persons from Alberta and 16 sets of unidentified human remains.³ The Manitoba Association of Chiefs of Police online records indicate that there are currently 168 cases of missing persons from Manitoba and 3 sets of unidentified human remains.⁴ The city of Vancouver's Police Department currently lists 57 unconcluded missing persons cases on their website.⁵

Additionally, it has been observed that a disproportionate number of women that go missing in western Canada are also, too often, victims of violent crimes.⁶ Ministers Responsible for Justice released a report with over 52 recommendations from a

¹ Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness Canada. *DNA Missing Persons Index, A Public Consultation Paper*. March 2005. www.psepc-sppcc.gc.ca/publications/Policing/mpi.index.

² Saskatchewan Association of Chiefs of Police. *Saskatchewan Missing Persons*. 2011. <http://www.sacp.ca/missing/index.php>.

³ Alberta Missing Persons and Unidentified Human Remains. *The Cases*. 2011. <http://www.albertamissingpersons.ca/index.php>.

⁴ Manitoba Association of Chiefs of Police. *Manitoba Missing Persons*. <http://www.macp.mb.ca/disappear.php>.

⁵ Vancouver Police Department. *Missing Persons*. December 2010.

http://cfapp.vancouver.ca/MissingPersons_wac/MissingPersons.exe.

⁶ Coordinating Committee of Senior Officials Missing Women Working Group. *Issues Related to the High Number of Murdered and Missing Women in Canada*. September 2010. http://www.scics.gc.ca/CMFiles/830992005_e1MAJ-2112011-6827.pdf.

Federal/Provincial/Territorial Missing Women Working Group in October 2010, which examined past cases of missing and murdered women in Canada and noted that the majority of these individuals were:

- Aboriginal women
- Living in poverty
- Homeless, transient, and lacking in social networks
- Addicted to alcohol or drugs
- Involved in sex work or other dangerous practices such as hitchhiking
- Experiencing mental health issues⁷

The alarming number of Aboriginal women who are missing and/or murdered in Canada, particularly in western provinces, is recognized as a very serious issue. The Native Women's Association of Canada's (NWAC) report titled, *What Their Stories Tell Us*, states that between the years 2000-2008, 153 cases of murdered Aboriginal women in Canada were recorded in NWAC's database. While these cases are representative of approximately 10% of female homicides in Canada, Aboriginal women in Canada make up only 3% of the total female population. Most cases recorded in NWAC's database represent murdered Aboriginal women – while 115 cases represent women and girls who remain missing (these cases are inclusive of negligence and circumstances family and community members consider suspicious). The majority of these disappearances and deaths of Aboriginal women occurred in western Canadian provinces, with over 65% of these cases being in British Columbia, Alberta, Manitoba, and Saskatchewan.⁸

Saskatchewan's Provincial Partnership Committee on Missing Persons

As startling statistics such as these began to surface, a great deal of public concern arose regarding missing persons in Canada and in particular the increasing number of missing and murdered Aboriginal women in western regions.

In December 2005, the Government of Saskatchewan established the Provincial Partnership Committee on Missing Persons (PPCMP) to address this issue. Organizations with knowledge, experience and expertise in the area of missing persons were invited to join this collaborative committee in order to examine this issue and try to improve responses to missing persons cases. The Partnership, chaired by justice officials, has representation from 14 organizations across the province including police, First Nations, Métis, community organizations, search and rescue and government. PPCMP established a vision of hope to, "work towards a future that ensures that when

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Native Women's Association of Canada. *What Their Stories Tell Us: Research findings from the Sisters in Spirit initiative*. 2010. http://www.nwac.ca/sites/default/files/imce/2010_NWAC_SIS_Report_EN.pdf.

people go missing there is a full response that mobilizes all necessary participants and that recognizes the equal value of every life”.⁹

PPCMP has identified and examined existing problems, sought solutions and made recommendations to improve responses to missing persons cases. PPCMP produced an interim report in 2007, which outlined a number of key goals and areas of recommendation. The Partnership also met with families of missing persons to gather additional insights and gain their input on the report’s recommendations. 53 people, representing 21 families of missing persons participated in these discussions.

PPCMP released a final report in October 2007, which identified several specific actions seen as necessary to improve the overall response to missing person situations. The report included recommendations in 20 areas that dealt with, “actions to improve public awareness and education about the risks of going missing, how to respond to missing person situations, what supports families need to effectively respond to missing person situations, and what improvements are needed in response systems”.¹⁰ The families who participated in the meetings greatly influenced many of the recommendations, particularly through the valuable insights they provided in identifying gaps and possible solutions to help the families of missing persons. The final report is available online at <http://www.justice.gov.sk.ca/MissingPersons>.

In 2009, PPCMP again met with families of missing persons to report on progress made regarding the 20 areas of recommendations from the 2007 report. The purpose of the family meetings on October 14 and 16 of 2009 was to update families on what progress has been made on implementing the recommendations of the Final Report and to receive further input and direction. A total of 24 family members representing 14 families participated.

In nearly all areas, PPCMP was able to report that action had been taken or was underway. PPCMP also wanted to hear feedback from families about some specific issues. One prominent issue raised by families was the jurisdictional limits of Saskatchewan's response. It was noted that jurisdictional issues often increase confusion for families around who to contact and how to proceed. Families suggested that PPCMP should consider how to manage jurisdictional issues in cases where the missing person disappears outside Saskatchewan or where the investigation involves police forces in other jurisdictions. The report of the 2009 discussion with families is also available on the Justice website noted above.

PPCMP continues to grow and expand its current membership, as there are many individuals and organizations that have a genuine desire to become involved in

⁹ Provincial Partnership Committee on Missing Persons. *Final Report of the Provincial Partnership Committee on Missing Persons*. October 2007. <http://www.justice.gov.sk.ca/adx/asp/adxGetMedia.aspx?DocID=3025,104,81,1,Documents&MediaID=1615&File name=missing-persons-final.pdf>.

¹⁰ Ibid.

addressing this issue. PPCMP continues to hold meetings to ensure the 20 areas of recommendations are followed up on and also to identify other possible initiatives that may assist missing persons and their families.

One purpose of the Western Regional Forum on Supporting Families of Missing Persons was to respond to recommendation one of PPCMP's final report, which states that, "supports need to be developed by [PPCMP] or other partner organizations to help families deal with a missing person situation".¹¹ Nevertheless, the Forum was organized primarily in response to concerns raised by families who wanted to see increased inter-jurisdictional collaborative efforts put forth to better assist those with loved ones missing in western Canadian provinces.

Presentations

At the Western Regional Forum on Supporting Families of Missing Persons, many professionals gave presentations on the work being done in their jurisdictions as well as at federal and national levels to respond to missing person cases. Additionally, the Forum was very fortunate to be able to bring in a speaker from Australia, where a national approach to coordinating action on missing persons has been developed.

Ms. Rebecca Kotz – What's Happening in Australia

Participants at this Forum were privileged to hear from Ms. Rebecca Kotz, the keynote speaker, who is the team leader of the National Missing Persons Coordination Centre of the Australian Federal Police. Ms. Kotz provided a unique perspective from a national agency. She gave valuable insights and information into what is occurring in Australia, which has comparable missing person situations to those in Canada – including various jurisdictions that operate independently. Ms. Kotz provided some data on Australian missing person cases and presented information regarding best policies and practices in Australia.

Each year there are approximately 35,000 persons reported missing in Australia, which means that one person goes missing every 15 minutes. One third of these individuals go missing more than once each year. Australia is able to report that 85% of missing persons are located within a week of the report and 95% of missing persons are located within a month.¹²

One participant asked Ms. Kotz how Australia arrived at their present state and if there was a catalyst that brought about a change in how missing person cases were handled in Australia and how a national approach was deemed necessary. Ms. Kotz responded by stating that change is usually brought about by extremely positive or adverse events. The catalyst to change was brought about by one major case in Australia, which was the missing person case of Cornelia Rau. She suffered from a mental illness and was

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Kotz, Rebecca. *National Missing Persons Coordination Centre*. 2011. [PowerPoint slides].

mistaken for a German backpacker as well as suspected of being an unlawful non-citizen. She was detained in Brisbane Women's Correctional centre for six months. Rau was not a prisoner, had done nothing wrong and was put there simply for administrative purposes. The mental health assessment conducted on Rau was inadequate and the finding that she did not fulfill any diagnostic criteria for mental illness influenced the treatment she received throughout her time in immigration detention. Rau was detained for a period of ten months by the time authorities managed to unravel the situation. As a direct result of this case a review into Australian Missing Persons was ordered. *The Palmer Review* recommended an urgent need for the establishment of a national missing persons database or capacity that would provide national recording and searching capabilities and enable searches against a range of biometric data – including facial recognition, personal descriptions and distinguishing features that would aid in personal identification. It was made very clear that this was to be a whole government approach.

Ultimately, this led to the creation of the National Missing Persons Coordination Centre (NMPCC) in Australia. This is a federally funded body that, “seeks to reduce the incidence and impact of missing persons and to educate the Australian community about this significant issue”.¹³ The NMPCC is guided by the National Missing Persons Policy PLEASE principles of: prevention, location, education, awareness, support and evaluation.¹⁴ The NMPCC was established not as an overarching unit – but as a supporting body to territories and various agencies throughout Australia to provide a collaborative response to missing person cases.

One particular area where NMPCC has made great progress is the realm of public awareness and education of at-risk groups. They focus heavily on working with families through media advocacy and campaign involvement. Families are profiled through media awareness – allowing their stories to be heard on a national level across Australia – even internationally in some cases.

One media strategy that NMPCC uses is the production of biannual missing persons posters, which feature profiles of state and territory missing persons cases. The posters are uploaded to the NMPCC website and approximately 5000 posters are distributed to state and territory police, public libraries and shopping centres, etc. This creates community awareness of these profiles and helps families know that the public are aware and are looking for their loved ones.

Australia focuses a great deal on the use of media and social media to bring attention to the issue of missing persons. Another strategy used is the production of personal accounts and short stories that are recorded and then played on free to air television channels across Australia. These short segments are powerful pieces that portray the reality of situations families of missing persons must live through. These can be viewed online at <http://www.missingpersons.gov.au/awareness/media-gallery.aspx>.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

In Australia, there are several national campaigns that are run each year to educate the public on issues relating to missing persons, which are National Youth Week, International Missing Persons Day and National Missing Persons Week. In October each year a very high profile missing person case of 13-year-old Daniel Morecombe is commemorated. More information can be found at www.helpbringthemhome.org.au and www.dayfordaniel.com.au.

National Youth Week is an immensely successful event in Australia. Youth are the most likely group of individuals to go missing with approximately 20,000 youth reported missing to police each year in Australia.¹⁵ The NMPCC conducted extensive market research to best target this at risk group. Input from the community is seen as important and youth are personally involved in the planning and organization of this weeklong event full of youth friendly activities such as: concerts, talent competitions, community projects, festivals, dance parties, sporting events and many other activities.¹⁶ This week is also used as an opportunity to educate youth about the realities of missing person situations and provide preventative skills and valuable knowledge to the youth that attend. More information on this event can be found at www.youthweek.com.

One participant asked Ms. Kotz if there are any programs, which she has observed, that offer help to families of missing persons. Ms. Kotz commented that the New South Wales (NSW) Department of Justice and Attorney General's Families and Friends of Missing Persons Unit (FFMPU) provides NSW families with free and confidential counseling services, information and referrals to families and friends of missing persons who live in NSW or where the person went missing from. The FFMPU also conducts workshops that connect like family members suffering from the loss of a loved one. They have conducted workshops, which have targeted siblings, family, and work colleagues that were very successful as they brought common loss in one room, which quite naturally built networks and connectedness amongst the participants as they kept in touch with each other. Ms. Kotz responded that families of missing persons find it beneficial to talk to someone outside of police, government and non-governmental organizations – to speak to someone who is experiencing the same type of suffering as they are. The majority of families have come away seeing this as a positive experience. Due to the overwhelming success of the FFMPU, Ms. Kotz would like to see this support system replicated in each state and territory of Australia.

Ms. Katharine Irngaut – Sisters in Spirit

The Acting Director of Sisters in Spirit, Ms. Katharine Irngaut, from the Native Women's Association of Canada gave a presentation about responding to the needs of families and the high rate of missing Aboriginal women in western Canada as well as how to specifically respond to and meet the needs of Aboriginal families of missing persons. Ms. Irngaut's presentation was informed by families of missing persons who articulated

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

their experiences of having loved ones missing, including interactions with police, the public, media responses and the overall support they received or did not receive.

Ms. Irngaut spoke about the importance of recognizing that working with families needs to be an ongoing and collaborative process.¹⁷ Families reported some negative responses to cases where Aboriginal women were missing. Ms. Irngaut's respondents criticized the police for unhurried or total lack of response to missing women and girls, including, "insensitivity to the pain and suffering of the families involved and the need for ongoing information; lack of thorough investigation; and victim blaming, dehumanizing, sexualizing attitudes".¹⁸

Ms. Irngaut cautioned the media to not bias the public by using mug shots on missing person's posters, but to be more sensitive and use family photos instead, thus combating the, "stereotypical, racist and sexist beliefs and attitudes regarding Aboriginal women".¹⁹ She also advised that families want agencies to keep in close touch with the family or through a designated family spokesperson. The media response was further criticized for their insensitive coverage, or the lack of coverage given to Aboriginal women and girls who were victims of crime. Ms. Irngaut's respondents indicated the media often failed to mention crimes against Aboriginal women and when the cases were broadcast, they were not covered as extensively or with the same sympathy shown to non-Aboriginal women and girls.

Ms. Irngaut emphasized the enormous need for services that promote healing including, counseling, grief counseling, spiritual guidance, and support from other families experiencing similar situations. Unfortunately, numerous families reported that supports such as these were not available to them. Ms. Irngaut maintained that, "there is a need for services that are, "accessible, accommodating and flexible, and timely".²⁰ The support responses of various professional services were advised to not only increase their sensitivity to the families but also to the culture of Aboriginal families of missing persons. One example spoken of was the Sisters in Spirit vigils that have provided an exemplary way for families to heal and to feel an outpouring of community support for them.

Ms. Irngaut stressed the importance of increased sensitivity in media, supports and services. She expressed the need to join with all who are attempting to assist Aboriginal families of missing persons so that a caring, united response can be delivered by government agencies, police, media and the community when someone goes missing.

¹⁷ Irngaut, Katharine. *Native Women's Association of Canada*. 2011. [PowerPoint slides].

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

Sergeant Lana Prosper – A National Approach

Sergeant Lana Prosper, a member of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) gave a presentation about an exciting new National initiative called the National Police Support Centre for Missing Persons and Unidentified Remains (NPSCMP). A speech from the throne given in 2010 from Public Safety Canada directed the RCMP to develop a centre to bring together all missing persons and unidentified remains data. This new support centre will receive funding of 10 million dollars over a 5-year period to accomplish its directive.

Work has already commenced and NPSCMP is striving to develop a national missing persons and unidentified remains database. Other priorities include staffing and establishing a national website accessible to the public that will tentatively focus on the three areas of missing children, missing persons and unidentified remains.

NPSCMP is seeking to partner with a range of stakeholders in order to have police as well as civilian perspectives help form this public website. NPSCMP want to know what families of missing persons want posted on this site, as well as what different agencies would find most beneficial. Using technology to its fullest capacity and informing and including the public sector will help to establish this initiative and create this new support centre.

The new website is anticipated to be launched in March 2012 and the database is expected to be up a year later in March 2013. By March 2014 it is projected that the National Support Centre for Missing Persons and Unidentified Remains will be fully staffed with eleven positions. Training is already in progress and will continue as the centre develops and expands.

Sergeant Prosper expressed the need for jurisdictions to work together in order to improve services throughout Canada. She acknowledged that even though police are solving the majority of cases, this is of little comfort to the families who still have members of their family missing. In such situations, solving most cases is not adequate for the families. Sergeant Prosper commented that, until all can be found – until we can do that – we cannot do our jobs satisfactorily for the families who are involved. Sergeant Prosper cautioned against trying to reinvent the wheel, in essence to discover something totally new, as policies, best practices and good models already exist. From reviewing these advanced models, Canada can look toward building a system that will be more effective and successful in handling missing person situations.

Ms. Freda Ens – The Pickton Case

Ms. Freda Ens spoke on behalf of Mr. Don Adam, a thirty-four year veteran of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, who was in charge of the Vancouver Missing Women Task Force. Unfortunately, Mr. Adam was unable to attend due to harsh weather conditions in Vancouver. Ms. Ens presented Mr. Adam's speech and she also provided some of her own personal insights as a victim services worker. Part of the Task Force's

mandate was the investigation of Robert Pickton. Ms. Ens related some emotional experiences of working on the Pickton trials as a victim service worker who dealt directly with the families who were involved. She spoke extensively of these families and described their struggles, frustrations and the personal comfort they drew from each other as they supported one another and shared their deep grief and sorrow.

Ms. Ens spoke of the elements of this case that were handled well and those that had detrimental impacts on the families of all of the women whose lives had been taken. One negative impact was the way in which the media reported leaked information to families. These women were mothers, daughters, sisters, they were loved and they loved. They were not just a sensational headline in a newspaper today, forgotten tomorrow; they live on in the hearts of their children and family. Their news stories may line a birdcage tomorrow but the impact of their words has a lifelong effect on those families.

The Pickton case was a learning experience for all involved and from those sad proceedings positive changes have been enacted so that such a chain of events will hopefully never take place again.

Minister Don Morgan – Saskatchewan’s Commitment

Participants at the Western Regional Forum on Supporting Families of Missing Persons heard brief remarks from Saskatchewan’s Minister of Justice and Attorney General, Don Morgan, who reiterated the seriousness of missing person issues – particularly in the Province of Saskatchewan and in western Canada. He emphasized that he, and the Government of Saskatchewan, are aware of the issues and are committed to help and support both missing persons and the families of missing persons.

Jurisdictional Approaches to Missing Persons Cases

At the Western Regional Forum on Supporting Families of Missing Persons a panel presented overviews of western jurisdictional approaches to missing person cases. Panel members told of both past experiences and current approaches and projects that are underway in their provinces.

Saskatchewan

Ms. Betty Ann Pottruff, the Executive Director of Policy and Planning and Evaluation with the Saskatchewan Ministry of Justice and co-chair of the PPCMP, provided an overview of how Saskatchewan has responded to missing person cases as well as what initiatives and projects are currently in progress.

In 2005, Saskatchewan increased resources for six new police positions to support cold case investigations and also to complete research into police response to missing person cases. Also, the PPCMP, as mentioned earlier, is an organization that has been working toward improving how missing person cases are handled in Saskatchewan.

Ms. Pottruff told of this committee's origins and of the final report they released in 2007. The report has become foundational as PPCMP works toward achieving its 20 recommendations. The full text of these recommendations is available online at www.justice.gov.sk.ca/MissingPersons. She noted that all of the recommendations have been acted upon and shared a presentation that provided updates on the actions taken on the recommendations.

Ms. Pottruff shared missing persons statistics from the Saskatchewan Association of Chiefs of Police, which showed the, "total number by gender, total number by race; total number of females by race; total number of males by race; missing person case locations [and] located persons".²¹ Saskatchewan statistics indicate that the majority of individuals missing from this province are non-Aboriginal males. However, like other western Canadian provinces, Saskatchewan records a noticeably disproportionate number of missing Aboriginal women who are also often the victims of violence.

Ms. Pottruff also discussed how Saskatchewan is responding to the issues raised by families of missing persons. This included further meeting with families in 2009 to obtain additional feedback as well the creation of this Forum in response to the request from families to look beyond Saskatchewan boundaries for solutions.

In concluding Ms. Pottruff shared her hope that in the future there will be continued collective learning to build stronger networks and stronger supports for families of missing persons.

Alberta

Ms. Carol Lemieux, Manager of Alberta Solicitor General and Public Security Victim Services, provided general information about victim services in Alberta and specific information regarding how Alberta handles missing person cases. Ms. Lemieux discussed both police and community based victim services available to help families dealing with missing persons situations.

She spoke of how connections made right at crisis intervention enables the families of missing persons to gain an additional avenue of support. She stated that the people they work with appreciate that they can speak openly and express their concerns.

Ms. Lemieux advised that when cases are complicated with multiple jurisdictions involved, Victim Service Units could act as a liaison between agencies. Ms. Lemieux said this liaison strategy is most effective when one police officer is designated to communicate for the police and one Victim Service Worker is assigned to provide support to the family. Such liaison personnel take on many responsibilities as they contact families, offer hope, provide answers and liaise with others to provide further assistance.

²¹ Saskatchewan Association of Chiefs of Police. *Saskatchewan Missing Persons*. 2010. <http://www.sacp.ca/missing/index.php>.

Ms. Lemieux pointed out that the *Alberta Victims of Crime Act* is funded by a 15% surcharge on all federal and provincial fines. These monies are utilized to help support families who are affected by crime in Alberta, including families of missing persons. Ms. Lemieux also described the new *Missing Persons Act* that will be introduced into the Legislature in spring 2011. This new legislation will hopefully allow the police easier access to information on missing persons where no crime is suspected.

Chief Superintendent Michael J. Sekela with the RCMP is a former team member of a very successful program called Project KARE that is based in Alberta. Project KARE is composed of an investigational unit that focuses on high-risk persons as well as a team that works closely with the community. Project KARE is a proactive approach used to help high-risk persons. C/Supt. Sekela stated that, in Project KARE, high-risk individuals are registered before they go missing. He remarked that 90% of people approached choose to register. These registered persons have 24-hour access to Project KARE team members if they require any assistance. Police can assist or direct them to the appropriate agencies that can assist high-risk persons. Police can report registered members missing if they do not see them out, or members can likewise report other members missing if they are not to be found.

C/Supt. Sekela also spoke about the Alberta Missing Persons and Unidentified Human Remains Initiative (AMPUHR). This project differentiates from Project KARE as it focuses on all missing persons and human remains cases (not only those that are high-risk). AMPUHR is an online database that catalogues nearly all missing persons in Alberta. The project first began as individuals wanted to get an accurate picture of who is truly missing. Much data was gathered and posted on a public website – accessible to all. C/Supt. Sekela looks forward to having a totally integrated system throughout western Canada, and stated that, “it is a goal in western Canada that can be accomplished and eventually lead to a Canadian model”.

Manitoba

C/Supt. Michael J. Sekela also presented information on behalf of the Manitoba jurisdiction where he is now working. C/Supt. Sekela provided information about Project Disappear, a plan created to specifically look at missing persons cases in Manitoba. Another initiative, which was formed in the fall of 2010, is called the Manitoba Integrated Task Force for Missing and Murdered Women. The purpose of this project is to review unsolved homicide investigations involving female victims as well as missing women cases where foul play is suspected. Similar to Alberta’s AMPUHR, Project Disappear is an online database of missing person cases within Manitoba. C/Supt. Sekela advised that in order for a Western provincial or even a national database to exist, there is a need for reconciling and ‘cleansing’ of data and provincial standardization of definitions, policies, procedures and data collection tools, to name a few suggestions. He also discussed what was next and spoke of the idea of creating a solvability matrix, which would be a tool to prioritize cases by our ability to solve them.

British Columbia

Three presenters spoke on behalf of British Columbia. These representatives discussed what they are currently doing to support families and what they have learned from the past, specifically looking at the Pickton case and the Highway of Tears project.

Ms. Erin Hobday, a Senior Policy Analyst and lawyer with the Victim Services and Crime Prevention Branch of the Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General of British Columbia discussed what is currently happening in British Columbia to support missing persons and their families. She talked about the effectiveness of their victim support programs, which are both police and community based as well as court support programs that provide assistance. Ms. Hobday related that families can go to these programs for support. She also spoke of their VictimLink telephone service that is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week in order to provide anyone with information, referrals and crisis support. Also mentioned was the *Crime Victim Assistance Act* that exists in order to provide help and financial support to victims of crime who are dealing with difficult circumstances such as the abduction or murder of a family member.

Ms. Carol Martin, a Victim Services worker from the Downtown Eastside Women's Centre in Vancouver, related some of her personal experiences working in the downtown eastside Vancouver area. She particularly focused on the negligent past of how Aboriginal women have been treated in Canadian society and the many serious issues that Aboriginal women are still facing. Ms. Martin talked about the Annual Women's Memorial March for Murdered and Missing Women that is held on February 14th every year. This event provides an opportunity for individuals, families and communities to join together and to grieve for those who have been murdered and remember the women who are still missing. Also discussed was The Highway of Tears, which is a stretch of roadway in British Columbia that is known for the high number of Aboriginal women who have gone missing along it. Ms. Martin spoke of the importance of building bridges, restoring relationships and educating individuals.

Ms. Freda Ens, a caseworker with the Victims Services and Crime Prevention Branch of the Minister of Public Safety and Solicitor General of British Columbia told of her experiences during the Pickton trial. She spoke about past problems, such as police not accepting reports of missing women. She also stressed the importance of families needing accountability, honesty and credibility from those they were working with in these situations. The value of families having someone to listen to them and to hear them was discussed. Ms. Ens described some support groups that were made available in British Columbia, at the time of the Pickton investigation for the families of the missing and murdered women and said that they were extremely helpful in supporting the families as they had many questions to be answered. Support groups were run specifically for these families and also another group was run for the parents of prostitutes and addicts. She and her colleague, Marilynne, continued to run support groups for the families after the arrest of Pickton, although they are no longer in use today. Ms. Ens spoke of how the Medicine Wheel was chosen by some of the family members that were a part of the support group because it represented all races and that

all races are equal. They looked at this as a women's issue, a poverty issue, an addictions issue and not a race issue. They also chose the yellow ribbon to represent hope for answers and hope for closure. Using a similar approach would be helpful when dealing with other missing person cases as everyone should be treated equally and supported fully when they are in these difficult situations.

Building the Dream – A Vision for the Future

The Western Regional Forum on Supporting Families of Missing Persons was a very interactive process. Forum attendees were walked through stages of development and creation in order to build strategies and solutions to help better address the needs and issues that families of missing persons face. Participants were organized into many different groupings throughout the Forum in order to allow for a cross-pollination of information and knowledge from professionals across western Canada. Our facilitator employed a modified appreciative inquiry methodology to guide the process and discussions.

The Discovery Stage

This first stage allowed participants to explore and discuss examples of best practices they knew of, had experience with or had heard about that were used to meet the needs of families of missing persons. A multitude of ideas was brought forward from these groups. The following is a representative sample of the most reoccurring themes.

One model in particular that groups spoke about as an example of a best practice was Project KARE in Alberta. Participants thought that this project was a good example of a proactive approach taken to assist persons at risk of going missing as well as their families. Project KARE not only helps to protect high-risk individuals but also provides first-rate victim and advocacy services.

Another participant shared a story where those involved in a case demonstrated excellent communication skills as investigators took the time to listen and converse with the community and their Elders. The community directed the investigators to check a local body of water one last time, as they believed that the man had drowned there. They were able to discover and recover his body by first listening and then acting.

A further idea that was discussed was that of best practices when dealing with the media. The issue of contacting families prior to the news reaching the media and sharing information with the family first was deemed to be extremely important. Other ideas brought forth were to understand the repercussions of discussing important details with the media and educating families to make certain they are disclosing all pertinent information. The media kits produced in Saskatchewan were seen as a great tool to be used with families of missing persons.

Another example of a best practice that was discussed in order to better assist families was that of early intervention and making initial contact as quickly as possible after a

family has been informed that their loved one has gone missing. One example brought forward was of an occurrence in Whitewood, Saskatchewan in which two young boys were missing and it was suspected that they were abducted by a known sexual offender. The group commented on the excellent cross-jurisdictional collaboration that occurred between western provinces. Numerous agencies and departments worked together to locate the missing children and ensure their safe return home.

Families most often want to take action and be involved when a loved one goes missing. The need for families to understand the processes and procedures that will occur throughout the investigation was discussed in some groups. One example of family involvement mentioned was the checklist created by the PPCMP in Saskatchewan, which provides families with guidance and steps they can take to be included in the process and not be left as spectators.

The Dream Stage

In the dream stage, participants were organized into five groups and each group explored visions for the future with the goal of creating a common vision and identifying key elements that will contribute to success in the future. The groups were presented with the following scenario.

Imagine it is the year 2015; your vision of a superlative approach for addressing the needs of families with missing persons has come true. People consider the approach to be one of if not the best approach of its class. Describe what you see happening – things that are new, different, the same, better; How did it happen? What steps large or small made a difference? Who was involved?

Once participants in their initial five groups developed their ideas for a future vision, the groups then came together and molded these five visions into a singular vision for success. This singular vision is represented below.

Police

- Create a national police records management system. Those who operate this system will be the gatekeepers for retention and analysis.
- Establish a national DNA database for missing persons and unidentified remains in order to facilitate collaboration between jurisdictions and between coroner and police services.
- Build a national website for missing persons and unidentified remains. Ideally, this website will be made available to the public so they have an opportunity to become informed about missing persons and provide tips to the police. It can also be a site, which confirms for families that their loved one is not forgotten and which they could use to complete tasks such as printing posters.

- Have a positive, immediate and coordinated response between police services and other agencies when missing person situations arise.
- Implement legislation that supports the gathering of missing person information in order to assist the police in concluding their files more rapidly.

Multi-agency Approaches

- Standardize police policies and procedures in order to ensure consistency in delivery of services across Canada. Also, develop a standard plan based on past history and experiences for handling missing person cases. Note that a standard plan does not mean that all provinces and territories must do everything exactly the same. Variations may be adapted by each province and territory to meet the differing needs of missing persons and their families within each jurisdiction.
- Reduce the number of cases of chronic runaways through a proactive multi-agency approach.
- Have one point of contact for families of missing persons. This will be an individual that has links to many services and professionals. They will have the expertise to be able to provide appropriate advice and referrals to address the dynamic needs of families of missing persons.
- Improve communication and consistency in obtaining and exchanging information between agencies. This may include a single repository for information about missing person including tools, checklists and related documents in order to make information more easily accessible to all agencies working on missing person cases.
- Sustain continuous review and follow-up to ensure quality of services.

Resources

- Acquire sufficient financial resources to support infrastructure, human resources, training and education. This includes police resources and adequately staffed police departments to ensure quality service and improve frontline responses.
- Have fully funded accessible services to support families of murdered and missing persons in all communities across Canada that take into consideration the particular needs of individuals in remote areas.

Family

- Have a complete support system for families that is responsive to their changing needs. This will include family-to-family support as well as assistance with media.
- Create specialized victim service missing person positions that can be liaisons and bridge the gap between families and service providers. There would be a need for these individuals to have cultural literacy as well as relevant ongoing training.

Education

- Develop public awareness campaigns and activities similar to Australia's grassroots initiatives at a national level.
- Have an involved and inspired community including: citizens, families, police, government, non-governmental organizations, coroners, medical examiners, education providers and Aboriginal communities.
- Promote education and prevention in the form of community safety plans.
- Employ a more proactive and preventative approach that provides early intervention and educational programs for children to stop them from going missing.

Strategic Results through Key Result Areas – Goals We Can Strive to Attain Now

In this stage, participants were organized into two groups and were challenged to answer the question, in order to bring about this vision and to create success what are the key areas in which results must be produced? Groups were challenged to narrow down the dream to only five to seven key goals that are attainable in the near future. The two groups joined together and explored the lists of key result areas they had created. After much discussion the group produced six key result areas needed to successfully bring about a collective vision. The results are as follows:

- 1) Human, financial and political support/resources
- 2) Commitment from the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police to work on missing persons issues including standardization of definitions, policies, and standard operating procedures
- 3) Coordination and networking across Canada including developing a support protocol for families, information sharing, best practices, service sharing and training

- 4) Access to information looking at what is needed, including legislative changes and police data and DNA
- 5) Education, marketing and a partnership plan about missing persons and missing persons issues
- 6) Public commitment and support to work on missing persons issues

Restraining and Aiding Factors

During this exercise, groups were tasked with identifying restraining and aiding factors that will either help or hinder their efforts in achieving the vision of a better system to assist families of missing persons. Participants were organized into two groups and generated ideas of what will both support or restrict the implementation of these goals.

Some of the restraining factors were:

- Lack of resources
- Jurisdictional conflicts
- Lack of profile on this issue on political agendas
- Competing priorities
- Misunderstandings

Some of the aiding factors were:

- Exciting material and expertise
- A will to make change
- Federal, provincial, territorial working groups or committees that can be accessed to inform or support our work
- National Police Support Centre for Missing Persons and Unidentified Remains development
- Family commitment supports the need for action

The Delivery Stage

The delivery stage focused on examining what needs to be in place to ensure success in helping families who have loved ones that are missing. Groups first discussed what would be required to support the attainment of the aforementioned goals. Then groups were challenged to form their ideas into actual concrete steps – both large and small – in order to begin the journey of their vision becoming a reality. The following list is what forum participants agreed are the next steps that they need to take in order to reach the vision they see in the future.

1. Produce a report – In order to create awareness and notify families, communities, public and other agencies about what has occurred at this Western Regional Forum, PPCMP is tasked with the responsibility of producing a report about this Forum. This report will be circulated to all participants in draft form for review, and finalized and released to the public.
2. Report to families – Forum participants discussed the importance of having input and feedback from families and ensuring that they are involved in important processes. PPCMP may provide a report and seek feedback and information from families of missing persons on the WRF.
3. Make a commitment – In order for any progress to be made it is important to have all agencies committed as well as to clearly identify who can do what, who is willing to do what and name various subgroups that are willing to provide assistance and help create strategies.
4. Build relationships – All Forum participants are responsible to build and maintain cross-jurisdictional relationships in order to work toward our goals and provide the best services possible to missing persons and their families.
5. Identify champions – Every province and territory is tasked with identifying a person who will champion the issue of missing persons.
6. Identify a key point or person – Participating jurisdictions will identify one person who is linked to many services and professionals that knows how to help families of missing persons.
7. Pursue partnerships and support – Forum members will continue to contact other organizations and groups in order to build positive partnerships that will help raise awareness.
8. Seek national attention – It will be important to get the report on the schedule of Federal, Provincial and Territorial Deputy Ministers Responsible for Justice. There is an International Symposium on Victim Issues being organized by Public Safety Canada for November 2011, where we may be able to present our results in a national setting. A panel presentation may occur at this conference, in order to link more partners and gain more support.
9. Raise awareness – All participants are responsible for presenting the key findings of this Forum back to their organizations and jurisdictions. There needs to be an ongoing effort in creating and maintaining awareness of this issue.
10. Provide feedback for NPSCMP's public website – Sergeant Prosper has indicated that she would be appreciative of feedback from various sources for her project. Participants are encouraged to provide feedback within one year so that a national website can be developed.

11. Develop a business proposal – A formal proposal needs to be brought forth in order to find an official coordinator to develop a business plan and support continued collaboration amongst WRF participants. PPCMP will take responsibility for this step.
12. Develop a business plan – The creation of a formal plan needs to be brought forth. Ideally this would be a joint partnership both on regional and national levels.
13. Build a clearinghouse of information – A depository of information about missing persons consisting of items such as inventory kits, tools, checklists, pamphlets and other useful sources will be created. Some participants indicated that they may be able to employ a group of students to complete this task.
14. Develop and implement a communication strategy – A strategy will be developed so that members of the Forum can communicate with one another to provide feedback.
15. Increase public support – Commitment and support is necessary in making sure that this issue remains a priority.
16. Establish a national database – NPSCMP is already working toward this goal, so it is important for participants to provide any support and help they can to Sergeant Prosper as her and her group work toward achieving this.

Thank You

The 2011 Western Regional Forum on Supporting Families of Missing Persons was made possible through the generosity of Justice Canada who provided funding for this worthwhile event. We thank representatives of Justice Canada for their support in making such a forum possible.

Additionally, we would like to thank the following groups and individuals for their contributions and efforts:

- Child Find Saskatchewan for hosting this Forum
- Nowshad Ali, of On Purpose Leadership, for being a most capable Facilitator and Masters of Ceremonies
- All PPCMP committee members who provided help and support
- RCMP for hosting a banquet in their Officer's Mess, RCMP Depot
- The Minister of Justice and Attorney General, Don Morgan, for his support, attendance and remarks
- Ms. Rebecca Kotz for her excellent remarks and for travelling all the way from Australia
- All the exemplary speakers and outstanding presenters
- All those who participated, attended and contributed to the success of this Forum.

Conclusion

Every day in Canada, individuals are reported missing and families must live through these frightening situations. The number of missing persons cases in Canada, particularly in western Canada is a serious issue that requires immediate attention. The disproportionate number of female Aboriginal women who are missing and murdered must no longer be overlooked. Families who are dealing with the traumatic situation of a loved one gone missing should not have to face such events alone.

PPCMP will review how to work with the report recommendations and plans to continue working with multiple organizations to further this work. It is hoped that other groups or individuals will also use the report in their jurisdiction to continue to build a more comprehensive response to the needs of families in missing person cases.

Individual Forum attendees, throughout western Canadian jurisdictions committed to work toward reaching the goals that have been outlined in this report and to take personal responsibility for moving this forward, as:

Ms. Amanda Pick, the Executive Director of the Missing Children Society of Canada stated:

I have attended a lot of these conferences and often I am left wondering where does it go now and will anything happen next? I'm going to tell people that this is not always the case. I am strongly passionate now, that partners across western Canada will be doing something about this issue. I can commit to continue talking and spreading the word about our partnership.

Ms. Deborah Chief, the Chief of Brokenhead Ojibway Nation said:

As chairperson of the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs (AMC) First Nation Women's Committee we would like to be involved as much as we can in finding solutions with murdered and missing women and offer to have AMC be involved in both planning and finding solutions to make this work. I like the idea of having First Nation's input and we can really bring a lot to the table and continue to be involved as this project moves along.

Mr. Terry Hawkes, the Program and Finance Director for Policing Services of the Saskatchewan Ministry of Corrections, Public Safety and Policing stated:

I was very impressed with the outcome of the last day and a half of work. To feel the energy and realize we are all committed to the same purpose to stop situations like having missing persons take place. My commitment is to work closely with police – both municipal and RCMP. My commitment is to work toward getting police using more standardized policies, procedures and risk assessment tools, to do the best that police can do to help in these situations.

The Western Regional Forum on Supporting Families of Missing Persons has allowed numerous individuals and agencies to come together to demonstrate their willingness and drive to improve the services and programs they provide to families of missing persons. This Forum has provided an opportunity for participants to discuss both the short and long term needs of these families. It is hoped that a more united approach to provide both shorter and longer term support and assistance to families of missing persons will be established. This Forum has allowed individuals from across Canada and even across the world to share how their jurisdictions are currently trying to meet the needs of families and how they are looking to better address those needs in the future.

From communicating and learning together, Forum participants were able to identify some of the needs of families of missing persons and some of the gaps in the services that are provided to families. Ideas and solutions were brought forth to address these gaps in services to families and to clearly establish what steps need to be taken next to move forward in western Canada. This report has provided recommendations for what a future system should look like, as well as outlined what steps need to be taken now to ensure the achievement of those goals. Stronger connections and networks between agencies are emerging across western Canadian provinces as a united front begins to appear with the mandate to provide the best assistance possible to missing persons and their families.