



THE VANCOUVER POLICE DEPARTMENT
Beyond the Call

**Vancouver Police Department Actions Taken Resulting from the
Missing Women Investigation Review**

1. The Missing Persons/Coroner's Liaison Unit

At the time of the Missing Women investigation, there was no full-time supervisor in the Missing Persons Unit. The Unit was managed "off the side of a desk" by a Sergeant with full time responsibilities for a homicide squad. As a result, in 2003 a Sergeant's position was created and filled in the Missing Persons Unit.

There were also a number of problems in the Unit related to staff qualifications, record keeping, investigative practices, policies, etc. As a result, retired Inspector John Schouten (who had not only Homicide Squad experience, but was highly skilled in the audit function) was contracted to conduct a comprehensive audit of the Unit. He completed his extensive audit in 2004, making numerous recommendations with respect to staffing levels, policy, selection criteria for staff, record keeping, use of PRIME, and many others. That audit was provided to the Major Crime Section Inspector, with a requirement for a monthly report as to the progress of the implementation of the recommendations. All of the recommendations have been implemented.

With respect to policy, in 2005 changes to the VPD Regulations and Procedures Manual were recommended and approved by the Police Board. These amendments require that a field supervisor be notified immediately of any missing person reports that E-COMM was proposing not to dispatch a police officer to investigate, to ensure that no time was lost in suspicious circumstances that might not be apparent to E-COMM staff. In addition, our practice for missing persons investigations has shifted to recognize explicitly that in the absence of information that a report of a missing persons is NOT suspicious, it should be treated as suspicious.

Since the Missing Women investigation, there has been a complete turnover of staff in the Missing Persons Unit, allowing new selection criteria to be applied. The Unit has since been functioning at a very high level and has been recognized nationally for its excellence.

In addition to improving the analytical capacity in the Missing Persons Unit by effective use of PRIME and other strategies, the VPD advocated with the RCMP to create a Provincial Missing Persons Analysis Unit within the Behavioural Sciences Group of the RCMP. The VPD also sought support from the BC Association of Municipal Chiefs of Police to fund a municipal police position in this unit. That effort was successful, but fortunately, to its credit, the RCMP subsequently agreed to fund that position as a municipal secondment from the provincial policing budget, as had originally been argued for. This provincial unit was created in 2004 and a VPD member was the successful candidate for the municipal position in the unit at the time. The mandate of this unit is to work to create harmonized policies for missing persons investigations in BC, to create systems to recognize anomalous patterns of missing persons even when they cross jurisdictions, and to ensure this information is acted on, etc.

One of the recommendations of a City of Vancouver committee involving family members of the Missing Women was the creation of a 1-800 number to reduce barriers to reporting missing persons, especially by marginalized persons. There have been discussions with the RCMP but this has not yet occurred due to resource issues.

2. Major Case Management

The Canadian Police College's major case management model, developed in 1994, is the accepted "best practice" for managing serious investigations. Justice Archie Campbell cited it in his review of the Bernardo investigation as "a well-thought out approach to the problems of major serial predator investigations, solidly grounded in Canadian investigative experience and the lessons learned from failures and successes."¹

At the time the VPD's "Missing Women Review Team" investigation began in May 1999, only one member of the Investigation Division had received the Canadian Police College's three-week Major Case Management Program. Since that time, the VPD has ensured that this course has been provided to numerous members. The Inspectors in charge of the Major Crime Section (Homicide, Missing Persons, Robbery/Assault), the Special Investigation Section (Sexual Offence Squad and others), and the Operations Investigation Section (robberies other than financial institutions, property crime) have received Major Case Management training, as have all their Sergeants. In addition, there is a Provincial Accreditation Committee created by the RCMP that exists to evaluate the training and experience of applicants who wish to receive "accredited" status to be eligible for placement in a pool of high-level MCM managers available for major investigations in B.C. The criteria for accreditation is very onerous. The VPD currently has six officers who are provincially accredited Team Commanders, including the Inspector in charge of the Major Crime Section.

¹ Justice Archie Campbell (1996). *Bernardo Investigation Review*, Government of Ontario, p. 271.

3. Selection Criteria for the Major Crime and Special Investigation Sections

With respect to the qualifications of Inspectors and Sergeants in the Major Crime Section and Special Investigation Section, the selection criteria have been changed to ensure that solid investigative experience is required – in addition to the other supervisor/management qualifications – for selection to these Sections. The result has been that the Inspectors in charge of both of these key Sections have extensive investigative experience at the Detective and Sergeant level. In addition, the Sergeants selected for Homicide, Robbery/Assault and Sex Offences since 2003, in every single case, have previous relevant experience as investigators in Homicide, Robbery/Assault, or Sex Offences.

4. Critical Analysis of Investigations

Two key strategies to move towards being a best practice learning organization are to ensure that we critically analyze extraordinary investigations to learn from our successes and failures, and that we then ensure that information is made available to others. To that end, in 2004 a practice of formally debriefing major investigations was instituted in the Investigation Division. These facilitated debriefings involve all the investigators and associated staff, and even Crown counsel where appropriate. The Inspector in charge is then required to write a report summarizing the investigation, the challenges faced, lessons learned, and recommendations for the future.

To ensure this information is easily accessible, in 2004, an Intranet-based “Knowledge Database” was created, on which major case debriefs and other relevant documentation can be made available in electronic form. In 2005, this database was significantly enhanced. It is now highly sophisticated and searchable, and includes numerous documents focused on investigative excellence. There is now a considerable library of literature available to current investigators and those who wish to improve their knowledge of investigations, and to understand the benefit from both practical and academic analyses of investigations. This database has been demonstrated to the Senior Management Team, and other steps have been taken to encourage its use both in the Investigation Division and the VPD generally.

5. Resources

When the VPD Missing Women investigation began in 1998, the VPD had been through a series of annual cuts in authorized strength since 1993 (and which continued to 2000). As a result, resource levels were a major issue. Since then, the VPD’s authorized strength has climbed very significantly due to the support of Vancouver City Council. There are now 243 more authorized sworn positions than there were in 2000, and more than one hundred additional civilian positions, many of those in crime analyst positions, which were notably lacking during the Missing Women investigation. Many of the positions came to the Investigation Division, improving resource levels and capacity.

6. Management Accountability

During the Missing Women Investigation Review, it became clear that some key information possessed by investigators was diluted as it moved up the chain of command, impairing effective decision-making. Steps have been taken to ensure there is effective communication, including senior management meeting daily with Inspectors and Sergeants in charge of investigative squads to be briefed on the status of ongoing investigations and to respond to questioning. A similar process is repeated each morning at 9:15 a.m. in the Chief Constable's office, at which time each Deputy comes similarly prepared to respond to questions from the Chief and from each other as to significant incidents.

The entire Executive examines issues from the point of view of the VPD response required, and resources are moved between Divisions on a short- or long-term basis to meet organizational needs. For example, this occurred in 2004 when resources were permanently moved from the Operations and Operations Support Divisions to address a lack of staff in the Sexual Offence Squad. More recently, resources were moved on a temporary basis from a variety of areas throughout the VPD to "front-end load" key investigations, including homicides.

7. External/Regional Policing Cooperation, Coordination and Collaboration

- Formal cooperation on multi-jurisdictional issues
- PRIME BC
- Integrated Units
- Joint Forces Operations, e.g., planned responses to gang violence; unplanned response to emergent issues, e.g., kidnappings
- Direct lines of communication at investigator, managerial and executive levels among all police agencies

III Conclusion

During the Missing Women investigation, there was an unfortunate "perfect storm" that contributed to failures in the VPD. Factors included the investigative challenges of an unprecedented case, a variety of internal and external problems, and the failure of the Coquitlam RCMP's investigation of Pickton in 1998-2001.

As a result of the Missing Women investigation review, there have been significant changes made to improve the capacity of the VPD to deal with challenging

investigations. These include changes in the Missing Persons Unit regarding staffing and policy; changes in the selection criteria and Major Case Management training for Inspectors and Sergeants in the Major Crime and Special Investigation Sections; the implementation of a debriefing and documentation process for major cases; the creation of a “Knowledge Database” to encourage both learning about and critical analysis of major investigations; changed practices to improve information flow from operational staff up to the Executive; and improved practices to ensure management accountability.

Externally there have been significant improvements in policing capacity in BC, and in cooperation, collaboration and coordination with police in the region on planned and unplanned multi-jurisdictional investigations.