

EVA NOTES ENDING VIOLENCE

Association of BC

A recurring series of notes on gender-based violence

NOVEMBER 2015

NEW BC MISSING WOMEN NETWORK



MEETING A NEED

According to a 2005 study of missing persons in BC conducted by SFU student Marla Jean Patterson, most adults that go missing do so because of a breakdown in their relationships with partners or with parents. For example, some women fleeing domestic violence will break off all contact out of fear of being tracked.

The need for police to confirm the whereabouts and well-being of missing women and the unwavering commitment of anti-violence workers to never compromise the safety or confidentiality of a woman by disclosing her whereabouts can create an impasse – particularly in cases where an estranged partner or family member report them as missing.

The new BC Missing Women Network acts as a safe and trusted go between.

The Ending Violence Association of BC has partnered with the RCMP “E” Division’s BC Missing Persons Center and the Surrey Women’s Centre to develop a new, province-wide BC Missing Women Network.

The primary intentions of the BC Missing Women Network are to:

- Locate women and children who have experienced or are at risk of experiencing violence that could result in serious bodily harm or death.
- Protect the anonymity and whereabouts of women and children who are fleeing violence, particularly in cases where their estranged partner or other extended family reports them as missing.
- Stop alleged abusive partners from exploiting police resources to find and gain access to women fleeing abusive relationships.
- End the impasse that can occur between women-serving agencies protecting the rights of women fleeing violence to access confidential services and police investigating a missing person report.

This new Missing Women Network is an extension of a successful 2007 pilot project developed by the Surrey Women’s Centre that established a communication system between law enforcement, victim services and key medical, legal and anti-violence services in their community likely to have contact with women who had experienced (or were at risk of experiencing) violence.

“Going missing is not in and of itself a crime. People go missing for many reasons. A right to privacy must be balanced with police responsibility to ensure the safety and well being of a missing person. Police must scrutinize what information is conveyed to the public about a missing person, what information is shared with concerned persons, and what information is retained in police files.” – 2015 Provincial Policing Standards

In 2014, the BC Missing Person’s Centre approached EVA BC with a proposal to create a similar province-wide network.

In this new BC Missing Women Network, police from across the province provide notices of missing women to EVA BC, who in turn fan out that notice to service providers in the relevant region(s).

A service provider who recognizes the reported missing woman reaches out to that woman to inform her that police are looking for her to confirm that she is safe.

The woman or her service provider can then advise the appropriate police force, the BC Police Missing Persons Center and/or EVA BC of her circumstances – whether or not she is safe – and also to act as a bridge in those cases where the police wish to touch base with that woman, if it is appropriate.

Members of the network who wish to remain anonymous may request that EVA BC forward information to the relevant police force on their behalf.

In Surrey, the Surrey Women’s Centre is often able to confirm with police that the woman is safe and accessing support services within hours of circulation. This allows police to close their file, and women who may be in hiding to avoid being the subject of a missing person’s investigation.

Participation in the new Network, which launched in late October, is optional. For more information, please contact EVA BC Program Manager Laura Woods at 604-633-2506 ext. 17, or at woods@endingviolence.org.



RESOURCES

BC Provincial Policing Standards 2015
(See Section 5: Specialized Investigations)

<http://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/law-crime-and-justice/criminal-justice/police-standards/provincial-policing-standards.pdf>

Forsaken: The Report of the Missing Women Commission of Inquiry

<http://www.missingwomeninquiry.ca/reports-and-publications/>

BC Missing Persons Act

http://www.bclaws.ca/civix/document/id/complete/statreg/14002_01

Community Coordination for Women's Safety - *Critical Privacy Provisions Which Impact Information Sharing in Woman Abuse Cases*

http://endingviolence.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/CCWS-Privacy-Provisions-for-ICATs_Nov_20_2014.pdf