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MORE THAN WORDS HOW OUTREACH MAKES A DIFFERENCE

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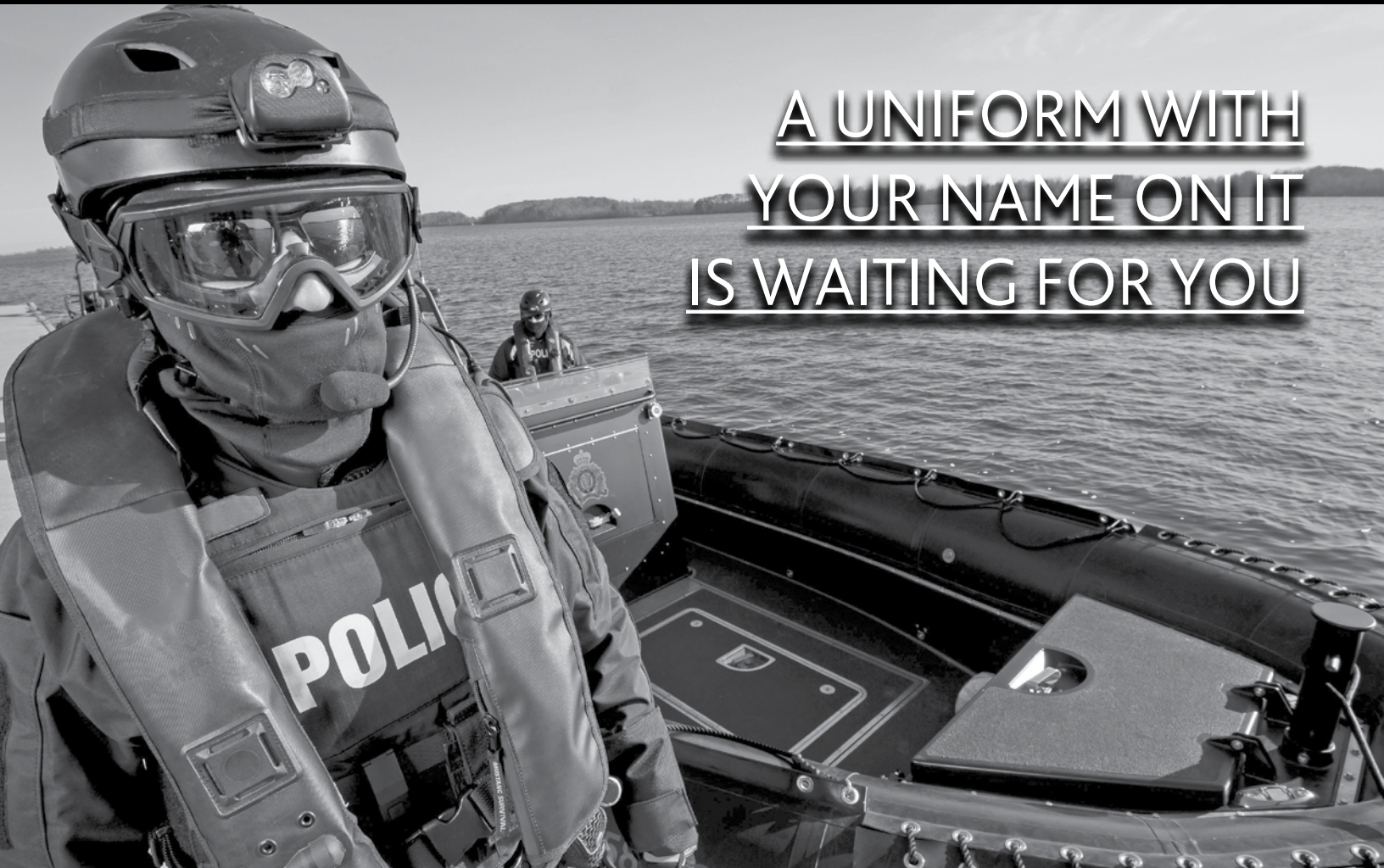
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ON THE COVER:

Whether responding to people suffering from addictions, living homeless or experiencing a crisis, the RCMP is reaching out to Canadians with community partners and a passion to help.

Photo: Leann Parker, RCMP



TANGIBLE GAINS

Community outreach is a term that's used often but can mean different things depending on who you ask. For police officers, it can mean simply being part of a community by becoming more involved with the people who live there. It can mean building or repairing relationships that need attention. It almost always involves consulting with partners and the public through communication to solve a problem.

For this issue, we focus on outreach for some of our most vulnerable communities and individuals — people who may not have the tools, skills or ability to ask for help themselves.

In our cover story, Paul Northcott looks at the challenge of responding to people in distress. He looks at various examples where RCMP officers have teamed up with community partners to support those experiencing a mental-health crisis. These partnerships provide high-risk, high-volume clients with support more quickly and can free up police resources.

For the homeless, accessing services can be a challenge. Patricia Vasylichuk describes how police on bikes or on foot are meeting residents who otherwise may not think to seek help. Positive interactions with people who are transient, or simply going about their day, is allowing easy conversations and fostering trust with police.

In Surrey, B.C., a recent influx of young refugees has posed some challenges for school administrators and police. The disruption of moving to a new country and learning a new language can be especially difficult for teens and can lead to acting out. Vasylichuk writes about how the RCMP Surrey Youth Unit is connecting with young people through

positive role modelling and sports to make the transition less frustrating.

In Newfoundland and Labrador, RCMP officers are inviting Indigenous students to open the door to a career in policing. The summer program gives students the chance to deliver information sessions on topics like internet safety and drug awareness, and helps build community confidence in the police. Already, some students are coming back for a second year and want careers as police officers.

Cpl. Kim Mueller has been pouring her passion for kids into a number of youth outreach programs for First Nations and Métis communities in Enoch, Alta. Her latest program mentors and educates Indigenous girls in grades 6 and 7 to keep them away from sex, drugs and alcohol, keep them in school, but also have fun.

Domestic violence is a problem that affects every community. In Moose Lake, Man., Cst. Ryan Harnum, a former counselor, reached out to a women's shelter and a certified Indigenous addictions specialist to organize a domestic violence workshop. It provided invaluable advice to participants who shared their personal struggles with violence and addictions.

We also feature how police in one B.C. community responded to hate crimes with a diversity forum. We look at police awareness training to better understand people on the autism spectrum. And our panel discussion asks police officers the best way to measure outreach to see if it's actually working.

What some may label as a touchy-feely subject, is anything but. As this issue shows, outreach is helping officers do their work and it's changing lives for the better. ■

— Katherine Aldred

RCMP



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HELP IS JUST A PHONE CALL AWAY

By Paul Northcott

In Surrey, B.C., there's a phone number parents can dial for guidance if they think their children are becoming involved in criminal activities.

Since 2016, the RCMP Parent Helpline has assisted the parents of young people, aged 18 years and younger, who call and are concerned about their children getting drawn into illegal activities, such as drug use or gang violence.

"Some people just don't know what to do, or where to turn, but we'll try our best to help. It is part of our commitment to the public and our youth," says Cpl. Mike Dougherty, of the Surrey RCMP Youth Section.

Through the helpline, parents or guardians can be connected with the detachment's specialized youth officers and counsellors who assist them in finding access to resources, police information and intervention services.

Parents who call the helpline can leave a message — either in English, French or Punjabi — stating their name, phone number and concern. The call will be returned within 24 hours, between Monday and Friday.

In 2017, 80 callers received services after contacting the helpline, up from 63 in 2016.

Dougherty triages the calls and then refers them to the appropriate individual.

Sometimes the cases land in the lap of Cst. John Wilson, who works with the Surrey Wraparound Program. Wilson is one of two Wraparound officers at the detachment who will help find the right supports for troubled young people.

"If the helpline refers a case to us, we'll do an assessment," says Wilson. "We'll check with the school to see if they're going to school, determine if any of the child's behaviour has changed and, if needed, we'll arrange to meet with the child and their par-

ent to determine a plan of action."

And for the most part, Wilson says the youth are receptive to the help. "It's rare we'll get a kid with an F-you attitude. I think deep down they know we're not there trying to sink them. Ultimately it's up to them if they want our help," says Wilson, who adds parents must also be committed to guiding their kids.

"Just being involved in your child's life can help, and ensuring they're involved with positive activities can keep them away from trouble," says Wilson. ■



Leann Parker/RCMP

The Surrey RCMP provides advice to parents, who are concerned about their children getting drawn into illegal activities, such as drug use or gang violence.

NEW OPTION FOR SEX-ASSAULT VICTIMS IN MANITOBA

By Patricia Vasylichuk

In Manitoba, victims of sexual assault now have the option to report the incident to police anonymously through one of three participating community health agencies.

In April, the province became the third region in Canada to offer the service — referred to as third-party reporting — which will benefit both victims and police. The option already exists in B.C. and Yukon.

"I think this is a step forward for people to feel empowered," says Supt. Jeannette Theisen, who is in charge of Winnipeg RCMP's major crimes division. "I've always said that sex assault is one of the worst, most serious offences police deal with because the person that's been sexually assaulted lives it

over and over every day."

The new policy is a way to recognize the trauma that victims experience and allows them to report in a way that makes them feel safe, gives them a voice, and helps them move forward in their journey, says Theisen.

Manitoba RCMP is collaborating with Klinik Community Health to improve access for victims in remote areas. The health centre offers a 24/7 sex-assault reporting line that will benefit rural victims who can't attend in person to complete a third-party report with one of their counsellors trained in sexual assault trauma, says Theisen.

Victims receive a case number and the report is sent to police, leaving out their personal information. Officers use it to

gather evidence for other cases — trends, similarities and for possible linkages to other incidents. Or, if they have enough evidence, they contact Klinik to encourage the victim to work with them.

But for victims, who statistically report only one in 20 incidents, the purpose of completing a report through a third party is all about choices, says Megan Mann, a sexual-assault crisis counsellor who has worked at Klinik for eight years.

"Sometimes people want to do something, but aren't necessarily interested in an investigation," says Mann. "So this gives them another option to say 'OK, I've done something. I've given the police this information. Something may or may not come of that, but at least I've done something.' ■



NEW RADAR IDENTIFIES SPEED HOT SPOTS

By Patricia Vasylchuk

In March, RCMP in Coquitlam, B.C. began using a new stationary semi-permanent radar device to help identify the city's speeding hot spots and improve how officers use their time.

The device gets mounted to a utility pole or light post to record the frequency, speed and size of vehicles passing in both directions. After a short time, the device is moved to collect data in a different location. Only speed data is collected — the device isn't equipped with a camera.

The move comes after an increase in

public complaints about speeding in two Vancouver suburbs.

"Now the enforcement teams can spend more time doing enforcement," says the detachment's traffic services commander, S/Sgt. Mark McCutcheon.

Before the device, which cost \$3,500, officers at the detachment investigated complaints by parking for up to an hour and monitoring speeds using a hand-held radar unit.

"It saves us having to send an officer to monitor the situation when they could be at another location that has already been identified as a problem," he says.

Since getting the device, McCutcheon

says he has used it to investigate complaints on about six different streets. Only one was found to have a speeding issue.

"The public pays our salary through their taxes, so I want to be responsible to ensure the city is getting the best bang for their buck," says McCutcheon. "This tool helps us do that."

When set up, the battery-operated device — about the size of a toaster — is locked inside an impact-resistant, watertight, tamper-proof case. McCutcheon says he removes the box after one week, uploads the encrypted data to his laptop and recharges the device before setting it up again on a different street.

McCutcheon uses the accompanying software, which cost an extra \$1,600, to run a variety of reports as needed. A report indicates if or when people are speeding, and the officer is able to determine the best time for enforcement, or if it's needed at all.

Approximately 50 of the devices are used by RCMP detachments in Manitoba, Alberta, and now British Columbia, says Jim Sheehan, Director of Sales, Research and Development at North Line, which distributes the devices in Canada. Other than Coquitlam detachment, the others use the radar on a more permanent basis — using solar power to extend battery life up to eight weeks. ■

Heather Escaravage, Coquitlam detachment



S/Sgt. Mark McCutcheon installs a semi-permanent radar device in Coquitlam, B.C., to help identify the city's speeding hot spots.

YOUNG VIDEO MAKERS SPREAD ANTI-GANG MESSAGE

By Paul Northcott

Respect yourself. It's a theme that resonated with a group of high school students in British Columbia who were asked to produce a series of anti-gang videos for young people.

"We thought about how in a gang you're just a number," says 15-year-old Sydney Ramage, who attends the Kamloops School of the Arts and served as the project director. "You're not respected in a gang."

Last year, members of the Combined Forces Special Enforcement Unit (CFSEU) — B.C.'s anti-gang agency — visited the school to talk about its role in combatting organized crime and gangs.

From that event, the idea was born

to have the school's media arts students produce four videos with powerful anti-gang messages. More than 40 students were involved in the project.

"We just thought, hey, wouldn't it be great if we could get the students to produce these," says RCMP Sgt. Brenda Winpenny, a media relations officer with the CFSEU. "To have the students energized, full of ideas and eager to spread an anti-gang message was incredible."

CFSEU provided the young filmmakers with some direction and then let them brainstorm ideas over two days. Winpenny says the students figured out what anti-gang messages could have the most impact on young people.

One of the videos shows how quickly life can change. It features a group of young people playfully passing around food at a table. The image blurs then sharpens again, showing the same young people passing around drugs and money.

Kirk MacFarlane is a visual media teacher at the school who led the project.

"The nice thing for me to see was the kids' passion and their drive," he says. "And we let them come up with their own ideas."

Since the videos were posted in April, they've been viewed by more than 2,200 people on the CFSEU's social media platforms.

"I hope these videos touch some people and encourage them to make the right choices," says Ramage. ■

TARGETING MENTAL ILLNESS

PARTNERSHIPS, RESOURCES HELP PEOPLE COPE IN A CRISIS

By Paul Northcott

When cadets arrive at the RCMP Training Academy, they know they joined to serve and to protect Canadians. But once they become officers, they learn some calls are tougher to handle than others.

That's especially true for people in mental distress.

"When we signed up for this job, it was to help people where we can. And when we can't, it's very frustrating," says Cst. Patrick McPhee, who works in Grande Prairie, Alta.

McPhee, a nine-year RCMP veteran, was referring to the challenges he faced as a general duty officer responding to some calls where it became clear that the person was suffering from a mental-health crisis, and he didn't feel fully equipped to deal with the situation.

Contact between police and people with mental health issues can be challenging — as officers may not be aware of an individual's medical condition. Also, that person may not be receptive to direct commands from police.

According to the Canadian Mental Health Association, a shift from institutionalized to community-based care has also resulted in more persons with mental illness in the community and more contact with police.

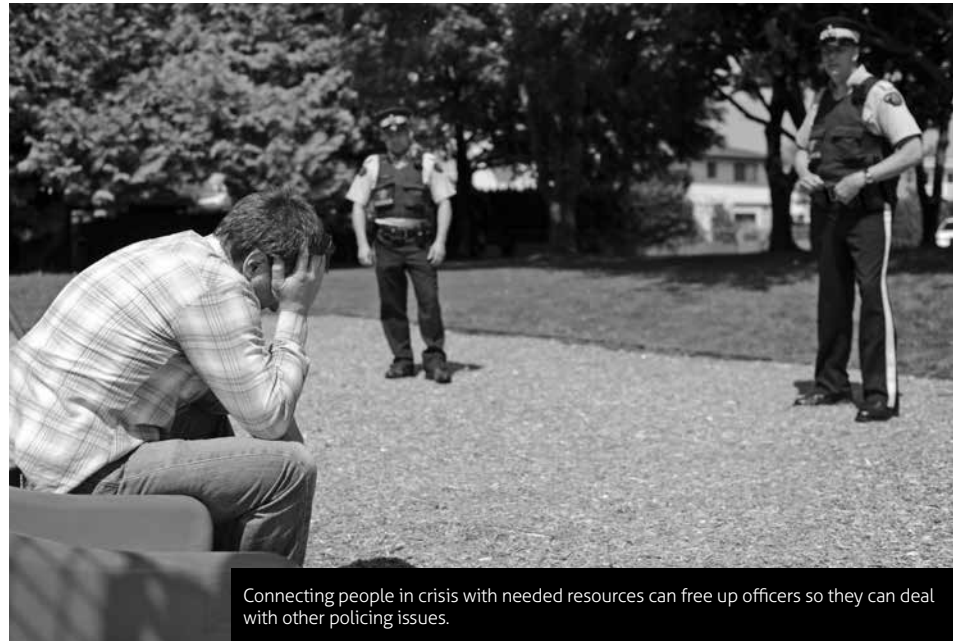
CHALLENGES SPARK INNOVATION

In Grande Prairie, a Police and Crisis Team (PACT) — consisting of an officer and a psychiatric nurse — was created in 2009 to support individuals experiencing a mental-health crisis in the community.

"Our mandate is to divert people in crisis," says team member McPhee, who notes both members spend a significant amount of time engaging with community partners to proactively address the needs of high-risk clients. "We want to help direct those people suffering from mental illness and addictions into the proper channels so they can get help."

In 2017, the team responded to 553 calls. A study by the Grande Prairie Regional College found that in 2016 and 2017, 66 per cent of the team's calls were de-escalated on scene. A second team was established in 2016.

McPhee says once people are referred to the psychiatric nurse, the root causes of their



Leann Parker/RCMP

Connecting people in crisis with needed resources can free up officers so they can deal with other policing issues.

problems or criminality can often be identified more accurately.

"There's often an underlying reason for why we're called," says McPhee. "So we need to find it. They could be on some medications and it needs to be adjusted. Maybe if we can change their medication, we can alter their behaviour."

There's also an economic payoff to the team's work because the same college study reported that the PACT program produces a value of \$3.70 to the community for every \$1 invested.

HELPING THOSE IN NEED

RCMP efforts to understand and help people struggling with mental illness extend across the country, and the benefits are two-fold: they provide assistance to those in need more quickly and they free up resources so officers can deal with other policing issues.

Cst. Valerie Conroy is the RCMP's social chronic program co-ordinator in Chilliwack, B.C. Although all RCMP members across the country are taught about crisis de-escalation and mental health incidents, Conroy has received extra training on mental health disorders and assessing people to connect them with more appropriate resources.

Conroy, who has done the job for almost seven years, works regularly with community outreach resources at Fraser Health to conduct risk assessments on clients and develop response plans.

"I try to make a difference by identifying high-risk and high-volume clients and focusing on identifying the resources that can best support those individuals," she says. "There are many avenues to navigate within our health care system and learning that system and developing relationships has proven very beneficial and time saving. It becomes a more efficient process."

Conroy says that experience and knowledge of the various systems has allowed her to become familiar with many clients, to know what their needs are and how to better support them.

She also reviews mental health files referred to her by general duty police officers. Conroy says an officer may recognize a serious concern or a person who has been involved in a high number of police interactions that appear to have a mental-health component.

"If there wasn't a social chronic co-ordinator, general duty members might continually be responding to calls for the same client," she says.



WORKING WITH PARTNERS

In Surrey, B.C., Cst. Kelly Thompson works with the Police Mental Health Intervention Unit. The team helps people with mental health needs who have come into contact with police and require emergency care.

“We often deal with clients whose perception of reality is altered, whether by their mental state, substance use or in some instances both,” she says, adding the unit works with a variety of other organizations. “We have a reliable network with our community partners to advocate for these individuals. We can use the connections we have and help those clients get to the services they need.”

For example, the unit is involved in a partnership called Car 67, where a specially trained RCMP officer and a clinical nurse provide on-site emotional and mental-health assessments for people, crisis intervention and referrals to appropriate services.

In 2017, the Car 67 team conducted 652 mental-health crisis assessments, 94 mental-health apprehensions and 822 phone consultations to help and advise front-line officers while they dealt with distressed individuals.

So far in 2018, the Car 67 team has conducted 431 mental-health crisis assessments.

“Our unit deals with high-risk clients and we deal with a high volume of calls,” says Thompson, who admits while the job is very rewarding, it can often be dangerous.

“Most clients have had some sort of violent interaction, often when police are involved, and most carry some sort of weapon for protection. I expected to deal with this some of the time but certainly not to the scope I encounter in this line of work.”

As a result, Thompson says she’s extra vigilant during her encounters with clients — always conducting a pat down and simply asking people if they’re carrying any weapons.

In Portage La Prairie, Man., the RCMP are partners in the Hub Model. It’s a risk-detection and crime-prevention program that includes community groups, such as school boards, child and family services, mental-health advocates, probations workers, provincial housing staff and others.

The partners meet regularly to discuss individual cases.

Cst. Sean O’Keefe says the model, which is in place in other communities across Canada, identifies people at risk so they don’t find themselves in the justice or health-care systems.

“If someone is in imminent harm, information can be shared to de-escalate the risk so we can then get in front of the problem and prevent an emergency,” he says.

When it comes to frequent police dealings with distressed individuals, O’Keefe says those calls are placing a growing strain on police resources. He says the hub model can

help identify and direct them to the mental-health services they really need.

“Before, officers didn’t have the time to sit with a client to figure out what’s going on,” says O’Keefe. “The (hub model) process helps unmask what’s going on so our first responders can go in and know if, for example, a person has mental-health problems.” ■

OFFICER DELIVERS MESSAGE OF HOPE TO YOUTH

By Paul Northcott

Sgt. Kevin Redsky walked from Newfoundland to Winnipeg this summer to spark change in the way police respond to young people who are suffering with mental health issues.

The Anishinabek Police Service member left Cape Spear, N.L., on April 1 on the walk called Hope in the Darkness.

“There’s a lack of knowledge out there about mental health,” says Redsky, during a pause in his walk near Blind River, Ont. — about 140 kilometres east of Sault St. Marie. “We’re the first on the scene and we’re witnessing youth in crisis. We’re the ones who are required to make immediate decisions for the well-being of those youth.”

A 2017 report from the Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs says Indigenous peoples in Canada experience disproportionately high rates of suicide. The federal government reports that suicide rates are five to seven times higher for First Nations youth than for non-Aboriginal youth.

“We do have to challenge the current system because it’s unacceptable how many young people we’re losing to suicide,” says Redsky, who struggled with mental health as a young man and lost a niece to suicide. “Some young people on the walk said we needed help yesterday, not four months from now.”

A second team of officers, headed by Senior Cst. Bob Campbell, of the Anishinabek Police Service, left Masset, B.C., in mid-May. The two groups — who have also been talking to young people along their routes — were scheduled to meet in Winnipeg on Aug. 3.

Sukhpreet Dhillon of the RCMP’s Indigenous Policing Service in B.C., participated in a portion of the trek from Tsawwassen to White Rock, B.C. This portion also involved Delta Police Services, Deas Island Traffic Services and an officer from the RCMP First Nations Policing Program in Surrey.

“When you do something like this it pulls down boundaries and you get to have conversations with other people and build relationships,” says Dhillon. “It was empowering to hear people talk about the challenges they faced, how they’ve overcome them and how they want to help the kids.”

The information gathered from young people, police officers, mental-health service providers and communities along the way will be compiled into a report. It will be made available to police services and agencies interested in learning more about the issue, says Redsky.



Tsawwassen First Nation Chief Bryce Williams performs a journey song during a break in the Hope in the Darkness walk on May 24. Also pictured are Delta Police Chief Neil Dubord, and Cst. Bob Campbell of the Anishinabek Police Service.

Lauren Hutchison, Tsawwassen First Nation

COMMUNITY OUTREACH

COVER

SOMEONE THEY CAN TALK TO

SURREY RCMP REACH OUT TO REFUGEE YOUTH

By Patricia Vasylychuk

The influx of refugees to Surrey, B.C., has posed new challenges for school administrators and local RCMP. Both organizations are responding to the waves of migrant children whose socio-economic situations and cultural differences leave them vulnerable to acting out.

“It’s really difficult because if they’ve spent two, three years at a refugee camp, they’re not getting regular schooling and they’re missing certain milestones that they should have by that age,” says Cst. Dylan Horgan, a member of the Surrey RCMP Youth Unit. “Culture shock, a new language, and sometimes absentee parents who have to work all day, all contribute to the problem.”

“So the frustration creeps in and the behaviours escalate because they just don’t want to be there,” says Horgan.

Officers in the youth unit, which is responsible for police matters that happen on school property in the Surrey School District, patrol an area with the largest student enrolment in B.C. Of the more than 77,000 students, nearly half speak a language other than English at home.

When they are registered for school, each refugee student is assessed to determine their education level. Children up to Grade 7 are sent to the nearest elementary school and tend to adjust well. Older students are assessed against a set milestones that determines the school and grade in which they will be placed. The students in this group who often struggle, says Horgan.

BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS

In an effort to build good relationships with the kids, provide them with positive mentors and help keep them stay out of trouble, every Friday after school, Horgan and his colleague Cst. John Wilson shoot hoops with students. They meet in the gym at Princess Margaret Secondary School.

“We’d get into our civvies, play basketball and half the students would be refugees with nowhere else to go,” says Horgan. “They don’t want to leave the school, so we just hang out and play basketball with

them. It took months before they realized we were police officers.”

The constables work closely with school employees designated as Safe School Liaisons (SSL), who informally counsel at-risk students.

A year ago, the Surrey School Board hired an Arabic-speaking SSL to address the wave of refugee students arriving to Princess Margaret Secondary School from Northeast Africa and the Middle East.

Much like many of the kids he has befriended and counselled, France Stanley, 22, immigrated to Canada from Iraq with his parents when he was 14. He says his age and experience help students identify with him, which builds trust and improves communication.

“It’s great for them to have someone they can talk to, that they can relate to, and that they know has gone through the same exact problems,” says Stanley.

To date, the majority of conflicts involving refugee teens at the school have been minor, though the students’ style of confrontation often makes things look more serious.

“It’s very loud and right up in their faces and it seems like they’re going to physically fight if you didn’t understand the words they were saying because they were yelling at each other in Arabic,” says Horgan.

The biggest challenge for Stanley

hasn’t been the students, but their parents who often take longer to adapt to life in Canada than their kids, which can create issues at home and trouble at school, he says. A drop in attendance or marks are usually the first signs of difficulties.

“Life here is very different from the Middle East and sometimes refugee parents aren’t willing to sacrifice a few rules to let their kids experience new things,” says France.

POSITIVE CHOICES

In cases where a student shows gang-associated behaviour, the school, probation officer, Ministry of Children and Families or a police officer, will refer them to the Surrey Wraparound Program, or WRAP. The program, a first of its kind in Canada, provides a range of services to at-risk youth and their families to encourage more positive lifestyle choices.

Even though children arriving from war zones have been exposed to a higher level of violence, they are at no higher risk of becoming involved in dangerous or illegal activities than non-refugee kids, says Wilson. He and Horgan make up the two-person WRAP team in the Surrey Youth Unit.

“It’s not a general rule that refugee kids are going to need more services,” says Wilson. “It comes in waves with them, but it comes in waves with local kids as well.” ■



Officers with the Surrey Youth Unit provide mentorship and targeted support to keep refugee youth out of trouble.



OPEN APPROACH

FACE-TO-FACE PATROLS HELP HOMELESS, LOWER CRIME

By Patricia Vasylychuk

Patrolling on bikes and on foot is helping RCMP officers improve relationships with local residents and help stop street crime.

The face-to-face policing approach is popular in heavily populated city centres where officers can easily move through congested, busy streets, parking lots and shopping areas, but is also being used in the suburbs.

Leaving the police cruiser behind helps lower people's defences and makes for better interaction, says Cst. Erin Stevenson, a mental health liaison officer at the RCMP Cranbrook detachment in British Columbia. Although there isn't a full-time bike unit in Cranbrook, bike-trained officers like Stevenson ride the city's seven square kilometres of downtown when resources and weather allow it.

"That vehicle is just such a barrier," says Stevenson. "When people see a police car, a lot of fear goes into them — that's their first instinct. And when that vehicle isn't there, they're a lot more approachable."

She says that when she patrols by bike or on foot, many people stop her to talk, and that the regular contact builds relationships with business owners, customers and residents, which often leads to crime tips that wouldn't have been reported otherwise.

In Richmond, B.C., where RCMP officers patrol the city centre year-round on mountain bikes, members of the Bike Patrol Unit have also noticed that officers on two wheels are more accessible.

"Sometimes people don't necessarily want to report a crime to police," says Cpl. Dean Etienne who runs the Bike Patrol Unit at the Richmond detachment. "But when they see us face to face, they are more likely to say 'Hey, you know what happened?'"

POSITIVE INTERACTIONS

In Richmond, patrolling on bikes has helped build relationships with employees at homeless shelters and community housing to help locate homeless people, often with mental-health issues, who have gone missing.

Positive interactions with those living homeless come naturally when officers are on a bike because they are typically walking or

cycling themselves, says Etienne. Talking to them on the street or during a scheduled drop-in to a shelter or soup kitchen allows for easy conversations and fosters more co-operation and trust during official police business.

Recently, Etienne had a difficult conversation with a homeless man who he got to know through routine patrols. The man's hoarding had become a problem for the city and he was being asked to clean up or clear out.

"It's easier for him because we have a relationship," says Etienne. "Instead of coming in heavy handed with a few police cars and moving him on his way, we can gently encourage him to look for another place to live."

Nearly 1,000 kilometres east of Richmond, increasing police visibility is a priority for the RCMP's Kimberley detachment in B.C., where officers are encouraged to spend time patrolling the community on foot. On average, two members of the detachment get out once a day, sometimes working it into their coffee breaks.

"It makes people feel safe and comfortable around the police because they have this informal relationship with them," says Sgt. Chris Newel, Kimberley detachment commander. "Here we've built that relationship. We're approachable."

Foot and bike patrols are also good for catching people texting while driving or stopped at an intersection, and consuming drugs and alcohol in public.

"With a police car, it's hard to hide because you're marked," says Stevenson. "Whereas, when I'm on the bike, people have no forewarning. It might take them a minute to figure out it's a police officer, and by that time I'm already there."

ENGAGING CONVERSATIONS

At the Codiak Regional detachment in Moncton, N.B., bike duty is assigned to a different platoon daily. Officers who are bike-trained patrol a large urban centre made up of the communities of greater Moncton, Riverview and Dieppe, between April and November.

Being on bikes makes interacting with the public easier for Codiak officers, who often leave the bikes and go on foot, says S/Sgt. Jamie Melanson, detachment Watch Commander.

"It's a very effective way to increase community safety and also foster relationships by having positive and engaging conversations with people," says Melanson.

Bike patrol is not for everyone, but police officers who are observant, good with people and naturally curious are a good fit for bike units.

"You don't need to come to the unit with super-duper biking skills," says Etienne. "You just need to be able to look around and see what's going on without running into people." ■



Cst. Erin Stevenson patrols Cranbrook City, B.C., on a bicycle to build relationships with the public and stop crime more efficiently in busy, congested areas.

Courtesy of Sgt. Chris Newel

COMMUNITY OUTREACH

COVER



SIDE BY SIDE

RCMP AND UNIVERSITY HOST INTER-FAITH FORUM

By Patricia Vasylychuk

When Richmond RCMP officers noticed a rise in hate groups and divisive behaviours creeping into the suburban community of Richmond, B.C., they wanted to help bring unity back to the neighbourhood. Richmond's diverse faith communities have been the target of protests, graffiti attacks, hateful language and violence.

"We wanted to do something to create an environment with more of a focus on what we can do together, rather than what's dividing us," says Cpl. Kevin Krygier, an officer with the Crime Prevention Unit, who helped organize the Shared Challenges Shared Opportunities forum last spring.

The detachment partnered with a local university to organize the event. During the forum, a number of guests spoke about their personal experiences, and about educating and empowering community leaders, law enforcement and grass roots organizations to acknowledge the negative experiences. But they also celebrate the good ones.

Krygier says that RCMP officers can benefit from more religious and cultural education to help them understand the behaviours of people they come across on duty.

"The lack of awareness even among our own members made us realize we should bring these groups together so they can understand each other a bit more, and so we can also understand them," says Krygier.

BEYOND THE BACKLASH

The day-long public forum was emceed by RCMP Insp. Baltej Dhillon, who, 27 years ago, petitioned the RCMP to change its dress code policy to allow Sikhs to keep their beards and wear a turban while on duty. When the news hit the media, Dhillon says he experienced a level of backlash he wasn't prepared for, but that the support of good people — including an unexpected gesture from the Jewish community — outweighed the negativity.

"They lent their support in honouring the faith and tradition of the Sikhs by taking out a full-page ad in the Vancouver Sun, reminding people about the sacrifices that the Sikhs made, with their turbans on, in the Second World



Students at neighbouring Jewish and Muslim schools in Richmond, B.C., participate in joint activities to build tolerance and understanding of each other's faiths.

War, where they took part in defeating Nazi Germany," says Dhillon, who is the officer in charge of Operational Readiness and Response and Protective Technical Services at the RCMP's Surrey detachment in B.C.

Despite many advancements over the years, Dhillon says feelings of discrimination still linger, and Canadians need to continue the fight in celebrating diversity in the nation.

Last winter, then 18-year-old Noor Fadel was attacked on Vancouver's Sky Train for being visibly Muslim. Fadel, who was wearing a headscarf at the time, was on her way home from her first day at a new job when a man she describes as white, twice her height and speaking fluent Arabic, began a horrible encounter that lasted one stop before he got off.

In front of a handful of other passengers, the man approached Fadel aggressively swearing and threatening to kill her and all Muslims, before suddenly grabbing her head. But, it wasn't until he slapped her hard across the face that someone finally stepped in to help.

"I was in complete shock, I was terrified, my body just shut down. And I could just hear someone yelling at the guy to get off of me," says Fadel.

Her hero, a man in his early twenties, pushed the attacker away from Fadel, ending the frightening encounter. Shaken and crying, Fadel got off the train to call police from her cellphone, not realizing her hero had gotten off with her to make sure she was OK.

"He is such an amazing person. He didn't need to do what he did," says Fadel.

Before the incident, Fadel was already actively speaking out against discrimination and racism, but her sudden fame has opened up new opportunities, such as speaking at the Shared Opportunity Shared Challenges Forum, the Vancouver Women's March, and local schools.

TOLERANCE AND UNDERSTANDING

Though experiences like Fadel's are more extreme, news coverage of such incidents give the impression that evil is winning in the world, says Lisa Romalis, the vice principal at the Richmond Jewish Day School, who also spoke at the event.

"Conflict gets on the news," says Romalis. "There's some really good things going on in the world, but the bad stuff often gets advertised."

Romalis says education is the key to breeding tolerance and understanding, and she believes it should start young. For the last number of years, she has supported a partnership with the Muslim elementary school across the street.

Every fall, rain or shine, the schools get together and prepare packages of food for the homeless and then hand them out in downtown Richmond.

"They're side-by-side, but they're not talking about religion," says Romalis. "They're just hanging out and having fun." ■

Courtesy of Lisa Romalis

COVER

COMMUNITY OUTREACH



Surrey RCMP



The Surrey Outreach Team measures the number of overdoses, violent crimes and property crimes so that they can adjust their outreach to better suit the needs of their clients.

COMMUNITY OUTREACH

COVER

HOW DO YOU MEASURE SUCCESSFUL OUTREACH?

THE PANELLISTS

- Sgt. Trevor Dinwoodie, Non-commissioned officer in charge of the Surrey Outreach Team, Surrey, B.C.
- Cst. Stephanie Leduc, Inuvik detachment, Nunavut
- Cpl. Derek Cosenzo, RCMP Yellowknife detachment, Northwest Territories
- Insp. Pamela Robinson, officer in command, RCMP St. Albert detachment, Alta.

When it comes to vulnerable or high-risk individuals, like street workers, runaways or victims of domestic violence, tailored outreach is often the only way to get them needed support. But offering a service is only the first step. We asked four RCMP officers how they know their outreach is actually working — and the best way to measure a program's impact.

SGT. TREVOR DINWOODIE

The main goal of the Surrey Outreach Team is to assist the most vulnerable people battling extreme addiction and mental illness in one of the lowest socioeconomic areas of the Lower Mainland Region in British Columbia. The team was created during an unprecedented time of violence, overdose deaths, and inclement weather typically unseen on the West Coast.

The team consists of 17 constables, one corporal and a sergeant. One constable

position works solely as a mental-health liaison, while the remaining work in a community policing capacity following a 24/7 schedule. We also have four bylaw-enforcement officers attached to the team during the dayshifts.

I'm very fortunate to work in Surrey. The city is very progressive and has supported this team throughout. Furthermore, Surrey detachment is the largest RCMP detachment in Canada. This affords me the luxury of having numerous support services to lean on.

When the team was created, we immediately saw the need to produce measurable data that our analytical team could quickly access and report on. We chose measurables that we felt could extract and compare both quantitative data and qualitative analysis, like overdoses, violent crime and property crime, to name a few. We could then compare them, over the course of the year, and see

what was trending up or down to determine success. We currently produce a monthly report and a large yearly assessment.

As the team became established in the area, we then felt it was a good time to have an independent expert, recommended by the local health authority, conduct a review of the team. The consultant came in and interviewed staff, partner agencies and our clients, and provided a detailed report highlighting our successes and areas of improvement. We were pleased that he was very complimentary of our approach. We knew at that time we were having success.

Finally, we implemented a daily briefing with all our local partner agencies, including everyone from shelter staff, faith-based outreach groups and harm reduction workers. These briefings are held Monday through Friday and provide the group the time and place to discuss what is and isn't working.



By implementing this approach, we're able to adjust our outreach to better suit our clients' needs.

For proof that this approach works, you need to look no further than 135A Street in Surrey, B.C.

We had about 160 individuals living in tents on this street. By establishing trust and respect with this community, and continuously adjusting our practices, we were able to successfully move all these individuals into supportive housing and shelters.

CST. STEPHANIE LEDUC

Throughout my career, I've been involved in community outreach initiatives that focus mainly on youth.

I've come to realize that policing activities and priorities are driven by statistics. If there's a spike in reporting of a certain type of crime, then funding and resources are fuelled in that direction. When the reporting declines after the implementation of these new resources, this may be seen as a measure of success.

But how do we measure community outreach? How do we show that community outreach is a valuable use of police resources?

I believe successful outreach is not something that can be easily measured using statistics; the measure of success is how the group's behaviour toward the police changes and develops into positive relationships.

This past year, Cst. Jenna Moore and I taught a class every week in the high school. Prior to our involvement in the school, we rarely had students speak to us during shift. Once the school year ended, we found that many of the students were now waving to us, inviting us to play sports and coming to us with information about crime.

One student told me that she never liked the police before but she now thinks the police are pretty cool. I see it as a success, but one that is pretty difficult to capture through quantitative statistics.

What I can tell you though is that I've seen its positive effects on a small scale.

I developed the Mini Mountie Program while at my first detachment in Drayton Valley, Alta., and it's now being implemented in schools throughout the Northwest Territories.

The program is run in the local elementary school during the school year. Every month, a topic is selected and a space in the school is used to provide informa-

tion to the students and parents about the topic. RCMP officers attend classrooms to speak about the topic and hand out colouring sheets related to it. At the end of each month, a Mini Mountie is selected based on reviews from the teachers and completion of the colouring sheet.

When the program is started in a new school, very few students approach me when in uniform — they shy away. Some staff are hesitant to have a uniformed officer in the school out of concerns for those students whose families have had previous involvement with the police.

However, after about a month, the dynamic is completely different. Students are excited to see police officers walk into the school. I can't count how many hugs and high-fives I've received since implementing this program. There are days when the students won't let me leave because they want me to read them stories or join them in class. They're excited to have us in the school. This simple program develops positive feelings toward police. Our behaviour toward people has a lot to do with our feelings towards them.

It's easy to measure certain crimes. But it's much more difficult to measure the quality of one's relationships toward police.

I know community outreach is effective, but it's difficult to truly capture its impact on a community. I guess I could start counting how many kids excitedly point to me in the grocery store on my days

off, smile and wave while telling their parents, "She's the police officer who came to my class!"

CPL. DEREK COSENZO

Beginning in the summer of 2017, the RCMP Yellowknife detachment partnered with the Integrated Case Management (ICM) pilot program through the Government of Northwest Territories Department of Justice.

The ICM Program, known as Pathfinders, supports at-risk people in Yellowknife by getting them the services they require like housing, income support and health services.

The role of the Yellowknife RCMP is to help identify and refer at-risk individuals by using a statistical and consultative process.

With a focus on societal-disorder type offences, like causing a disturbance, an officer identifies individuals based on the number of contacts they've had with police.

For example, the police were called several times to deal with one individual because he was often found heavily intoxicated and unconscious in public places. This person's behaviour was associated with homelessness and an alcohol or substance use issue.

He was an ideal candidate for referral. He was connected with the ICM Program and assigned a Pathfinder, who helps people access the services they require to ensure their basic needs are met.

The RCMP then continues to act as a liaison for this person. The program



Cst. Stephanie Leduc leads a four-day bike rodeo in Inuvik, Nunavut, to teach students about bike safety and skills. She says the measure of successful outreach is how a community's behaviour toward police changes over time.

Nunavut RCMP



manager in Yellowknife recognizes the challenges that each individual faces when attempting to deal with personal issues and service navigation.

Because program participants are identified individually and using a statistical approach, the RCMP can monitor the program's success statistically.

For the previous example, during a six-month period from December 2016 to May 2017, this program participant had 67 police contacts. As a result of the nature of these contacts, the individual was referred to the program.

The detachment continued to monitor the number of police contacts that this person had through reporting periods. Since referral to the program, there has been a statistical drop in the number of police contacts. From April 1 to June 30, 2017, there were 30 police contacts. From July 1 to Sept. 30, 2017, there were 23 police contacts. From Oct. 1 to Dec. 31, 2017, there were 19 police contacts. And from Jan. 1 to Mar. 31, 2018, there were only seven police contacts.

There was a 63 per cent decrease from the 3rd to 4th quarter reporting period. It was during this time that the participant was able to access the Yellowknife Housing First program and obtained his own apartment. Once the basic needs of shelter, food and safety of the participant were met, there was a substantial decrease in police contact.

Using this methodology, police can measure and show the success from a calls-for-police-service perspective and how programs such as Housing First and the ICM program can help.

INSP. PAMELA ROBINSON

Every moment in policing presents a teachable moment, where an officer can educate the public on the parameters of the law, the limitations and expectations of completing their duties, and the responsibility of residents in assisting the police maintain community safety.

This open dialogue is the core of community outreach. It's from these relationships with our communities that we truly understand the culture, diversity and needs of our clients.

Recognizing that crime statistics only measure a small part of our policing effort, our success in community outreach is measured in our ability to adapt and respond to the communities' needs.



A golf cart patrol in St. Albert, Alta, gives police the chance to connect with members of the community and patrol 85 kilometres of secluded trails.

St. Albert RCMP

In 2017, the City of St. Albert completed a community satisfaction survey in which 92 per cent of respondents rated their perception of St. Albert as a safe place to live. In addition, 89 per cent of respondents stated that police met their expectations in service delivery. Respondents who felt that policing didn't meet their expectations requested an increase in police visibility, patrols and enforcement.

These positive results are attributed to a long-term plan focused on community engagement at all levels, a communication strategy focused on education, enforcement, and a commitment to working collaboratively with our citizens and partners to understand each other's needs.

We've identified innovative ways to adapt our response to meet the needs of our citizens by implementing a golf cart patrol on our 85-km trail system. Using a golf cart doesn't require specialized training for police. It provides an opportunity for increased visibility and citizen engagement, and it acts as a deterrent for crimes in these secluded locations.

This tool has become invaluable in our ability to connect with the community and provides an opportunity for our diverse population to both meet the police outside of a call for service and report concerns or suspicious behaviours. Residents now report feeling safer when using the trail system and these collaborative efforts have led to a 33 per cent decrease in mischief-related

offences during the summer months.

We've also empowered our citizens with knowledge by implementing a crime map that reports daily trends in property crimes partnered with a communication strategy listing of how and why to report suspicious behaviours. The information is then used to track criminal behaviours and identify offenders.

We've worked with our partners, like the City of St. Albert Strategy and Mobilization Group, which includes representatives from the municipality, health services, schools, ministerial groups, family services and community supports. These partners support individuals in crisis and help to make sure they're served through a co-ordinated, facilitated and supported community response.

The collaboration and support of partnering agencies have influenced a five per cent increase in reported domestic violence incidents (from 607 in 2016-2017 to 638 in 2017-2018) and 33 per cent increase in reports of sexual assault offences (nine reported in 2016-2017 to 12 reported in 2017-2018).

Communication strategies surrounding public safety awareness and support have empowered victims to come forward and report these serious crimes types.

If we take the time to work collaboratively and explain the *why*, community outreach becomes human nature and we're able to collectively address emerging issues before they become trends. ■

OPENING THE DOOR TO POLICING

RCMP WORK WITH INDIGENOUS YOUTH

By Paul Northcott

Many young Indigenous people in Newfoundland and Labrador have spent their summers working for the RCMP, gaining insight into law enforcement and helping to create positive links between their communities and police.

The Indigenous Summer Student Program has operated in the province for almost 20 years. This summer, 10 students from the Qalipu and the Miawpukek First Nations worked all over the island portion of the province as RCMP summer students, following their training in St. John's, N.L.

RCMP Cst. Brad Squires has managed the nine-week program for the past two years.

"Students learn so much about policing and community engagement," says Squires. "With this program, band members see their young people working with the police, which helps show the RCMP's commitment to diversity."

To participate, students must be between the ages of 19 to 29, be enrolled in a post-secondary program and have no criminal record. They also attend a three-day course where they learn about community policing, participate in physical fitness drills and even train in media awareness.

THE STUDENT EXPERIENCE

Participants Josh Lannon and Rebecca Oxford helped deliver information sessions to the local communities on issues like bike safety, drug and alcohol awareness, internet safety and how cottage owners can protect their property. As well, the students represented the RCMP at local events, like powwows and sporting activities, wearing a uniform that included a polo shirt with the RCMP symbol and the crest of their band.

They were also given some work at the detachment, such as administrative duties.

"We try to give our students exposure to a blend of the different types of experiences policing has to offer, but it really depends on the needs of the detachment and the communities," says Squires.

Oxford — a member of the Miawpukek First Nation, which is located on

Newfoundland's south coast — worked mainly at the RCMP's office in Conne River, N.L.

The 20-year-old nursing student says she wanted to be that "middle person" between her community and the police.

"The RCMP is not just about all the bad stuff you see on TV," she says. "If people around Conne River can see someone they know working with the police, I think that can help build trust."

She says creating community confidence in the police is key.

"I mean, they're the ones you're supposed to turn to when you have a problem," says Oxford. "I want to make sure people know the RCMP is there to help."

Oxford's not sure if she will join a police force after she graduates in 2021.

Lannon, on the other hand, wants to become a police officer.

The member of the Qalipu First Nation worked at the RCMP detachment in Deer Lake, N.L. — on the province's west coast. He returned to the program in 2018 for a second year.

"I just wanted to learn more about everything that goes on in the detachment," says Lannon, who is studying psychology. "There's a lot more to policing than driving around on patrol. By working with the

members, we get a better understanding into how things run."

After he graduates in 2020, Lannon plans to apply to the RCMP and the Royal Newfoundland Constabulary.

"I'll go with whoever will take me first," says Lannon jokingly. "I just really wanted to be involved in policing."

THE BENEFITS

Squires says there are often stories of people being afraid, or nervous, around police.

"Programs like this can break down barriers for everyone. And to create relationships with First Nations you need to build them over time by making connections. You can't just snap your fingers to make them happen," he says.

Although a big part of the program is to help the students decide if they want to pursue a career in policing — and some do, Squires says — he notes the initiative pays off in other ways, too.

"I've seen the young people through the entire process. I can see the way they've changed and have a sense of pride in what they're about to do," he says. "Even if they don't choose policing, I know they'll go out in the community and represent the RCMP well." ■



Rebecca Oxford — a member of the Miawpukek First Nation on Newfoundland's south coast — worked with the RCMP this year as part of the Indigenous Summer Student Program.



CANDID CONVERSATIONS

INDIGENOUS OFFICER STEERS GIRLS DOWN HEALTHY PATH

Courtesy of Cpl. Kim Mueller



Cpl. Kim Mueller (second from left) mentors Indigenous girls to help prevent problems before they start.

For 13 years, Cpl. Kim Mueller has been pouring her passion for kids into a number of youth outreach programs for First Nations and Métis communities in Alberta. Patricia Vasylchuk spoke to Mueller about her latest project in Enoch, Alta., and why she thinks being an Indigenous woman helps her build better relationships with local youth and their families.

HOW DOES BEING INDIGENOUS HELP YOU IN YOUR POLICE WORK?

As an Aboriginal person, right away I'm accepted by the community. I work with a lot of phenomenal non-Aboriginal members working in Aboriginal communities doing amazing work, but we can hit the ground running when we have an Aboriginal person who understands the culture, the history, the trauma. Some of our members, like myself, have lived through some of those traumas and can understand what some of our clients are going through. The community just has that trust for you almost automatically.

YOU PREVIOUSLY RAN A PROGRAM FOR AT-RISK BOYS BUT WHAT YOU'RE DOING NOW IS FOR GIRLS. WHAT IS STRATEGIES FOR ABORIGINAL FEMALE EMPOWERMENT?

It's built on mentorship and education. I hand-picked 10 girls. We did junior high last year, but we're doing grades 6 and 7

this year. We went a little younger this year just to see if it's a better time to work with them — before they get into drugs, alcohol and sex — because the girls I picked last year were already engaging in some of these dangerous behaviours. Part of being in our group is that they have to stay in school, stay out of criminal activity, and stay away from drugs and alcohol. At the end of the program we do a big trip. Last year we went to Jasper and Banff.

WHAT DO YOU DO WITH THE GIRLS?

My formula is half fun, half education. We meet weekly, and every second week we do a life lesson, whether its drugs or alcohol, hygiene or safe sex. And the next week we do fun things. We went to the movies, the water park, the mall. And that's when we can let our guard down and get to know each other. Have some fun, have some laughs. And the next week we'll go back to a serious topic.

WHY IS MENTORSHIP SO IMPORTANT?

Just like the boys in MAGIC (Mothers Against Gangs in Communities), some of these girls don't have mothers actively involved in their lives, so it's just filling that gap to try to minimize those risk factors. Because a lot of our girls are being victimized or going missing. Sometimes they put themselves in risky situations. They're getting involved in drugs, alcohol, going out to parties, hitchhik-

ing. So we're having very candid conversations about those types of choices.

WHAT MAKES THESE PROGRAMS SUCCESSFUL?

The strength that the RCMP brought, is that we work 24/7. So if one of the kids is having a crisis at two in the morning, even if I wasn't available, I could call one of my co-workers and say: "Hey I've got this kid. This is where he lives. I need you to go pick him up." Sometimes it's going above and beyond, getting out of bed at two in the morning. But, that's also what builds trust with those kids. People in their lives have let them down before, so when they could call someone and I would be "OK, give me 15 minutes and I'll be there," that really went a long way.

WHAT MOTIVATES YOU TO DEVELOP YOUTH PROGRAMS?

In Enoch, there's usually around 30 Grade 12 students for a full class and on average we're only seeing a handful each year graduate. So, we're trying to change that and get these kids on a good path. For any child, mentorship could make or break what path they go on. I believe that if we would front-load some money to help these guys when they're younger and keep them on a healthy path, it would be far less expensive than if we let them go sideways and then try to intervene and put them back on track. ■

COMMUNITY OUTREACH

COVER



CRITICAL COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

MÉTIS LIAISON OFFICERS HELP BUILD RELATIONSHIPS, IMPROVE SAFETY

By Paul Northcott

Cpl. Cheryle Hayden is one of five RCMP Métis liaison officers stationed across Canada — and she has a lot of ground to cover.

She works with Métis throughout Ontario, delivering programs and products to help them and their communities with a wide array of issues. Hayden says the work is important and well-received.

“People keep calling me to come back because they want to talk about issues of concern,” says the 31-year RCMP veteran who’s based in Sault Ste. Marie, Ont. “They wouldn’t ask if they didn’t care.”

Hayden, along with the RCMP Métis liaison officers in British Columbia, Alberta, Manitoba and the Northwest Territories, offer programs to the 587,545 Canadians who identify as Métis.

The officers attend community events and cultural celebrations, deliver crime-prevention and youth-empowerment programs, promote Métis cultural training and awareness and act as a liaison between community members and the RCMP.

PROVINCE-WIDE CONNECTIONS

That work might see Hayden driving to Bancroft, Ont., to deliver a healthy relationships workshop or going to Kenora, Ont., to talk about frauds and scams.

In British Columbia, Cpl. Susan Boyes has worked with Indigenous and Métis communities for years. Like her Ontario colleague, she travels all over the province, although the bulk of her work is based in B.C.’s Lower Mainland.

Boyes’ job involves working with communities, identifying their needs and supplying the appropriate programming. The success of all that work begins with one simple, yet often complex, task — building relationships.

“In B.C., the RCMP recognized there was a missed opportunity and we need to build relationships with the Métis,” says Boyes, who adds that could mean something as informal as talking to people over coffee or attending a multi-day youth event.

There are also serious issues to address. “For instance, domestic violence is always a

concern and we want to try and get ahead of the situation in communities where it’s been identified as an issue,” says Boyes. “That means bringing in speakers and experts to educate people so we can prevent things from escalating.”

In August, Hayden’s efforts in Ontario earned her an award from the Métis Nation of Ontario. She was presented with a cultural yellow shawl with coloured stripes, which represents the wisdom women bring to the communities. But Hayden maintains it’s the quality of the programming that counts most.

“And those programs have to be sustainable and built for the long term,” says Hayden, who also develops educational literature and frequently visits schools to deliver programming for Métis youth. “We always have to make sure we have more to offer.”

IMPROVING SAFETY

Insp. Kim Taplin, the Officer in Charge of National Aboriginal Policing Services, oversees the Métis liaison officers.

“The community engagement and outreach undertaken has improved public safety in Métis communities by reducing crime,” says Taplin. “It’s also led to better understanding between the two groups and has enhanced communication.”

Members of the Métis communities also see the benefits.

Respondents to a 2016 survey about the liaison officers’ work said they supported the initiative. Those who answered identified several benefits including that the officers’ efforts helped to identify gaps in policing services and they provided a voice to the Métis in their dealings with the RCMP.

Taplin adds their work fosters reconciliation with Métis people across Canada, a huge priority for the Government of Canada and most importantly for RCMP employees. She says the RCMP wants to build a renewed, nation-to-nation relationship with Indigenous Peoples, based on recognition of rights, respect, co-operation and partnership.

One example of that recognition occurred last year when the RCMP pledged to return artifacts that once belonged to Métis Leader Louis Riel. They include a crucifix, a book of poetry and a knife.

The signed agreement states that the RCMP Heritage Centre in Regina, Sask., will continue to act as caretaker of the items until the Métis Nation finds a permanent home for them. The formal transfer of the items is expected next year.

“The officers’ work has built trust between the Métis and the RCMP,” says Taplin. “Relationships are vital. We acknowledge that they take time to build, but they are a priority, and local initiatives must be community-driven and supported.” ■



Métis liaison officers act as a vital link between community members and the RCMP. In 2017, the work of Cpl. Cheryle Hayden, pictured second from left, was recognized by the Métis Nation of Ontario.



NO MORE SUFFERING IN SILENCE

WORKSHOP HELPS COMMUNITY CONFRONT DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Courtesy of Stephanie Harnum



RCMP Cst. Ryan Harnum speaks about community resources and coping skills during a domestic-violence workshop held in Moose Lake, Man., earlier this year.

By Paul Northcott

Domestic violence, often fuelled by drug and alcohol abuse, can destroy lives. It's in communities everywhere and in Moose Lake, Man. — population 1,100 — RCMP Cst. Ryan Harnum decided to do something about it.

“It seems when there’s a call for service involving domestic disputes, we’re the ones putting Band-Aids on the problem,” says Harnum, who’s been working in the north-western Manitoba community — located about 75 kilometres southeast of The Pas — for two years.

The former Newfoundland-based Pentecostal pastor, who also holds a master’s degree in counselling, decided to organize a domestic-violence workshop where addictions issues would be a featured component. He says the majority of the detachment’s domestic-violence calls can be traced to substance abuse.

“We want to get out in front of the problem and offer some information or resources to the community to find some way to help,” he says. “And more importantly, I did not want to go in there and just hand out pamphlets.”

Another important element was to reach out to community groups — such as Aurora House, a women’s shelter, and the Cree Nation Tribal Health Centre Inc. — to participate in and help deliver sessions.

CONFRONTING THE PROBLEM

The inaugural workshop was held in April and 72 people attended the full-day event.

It opened with a prayer and a smudging ceremony. Information sessions were then separately held for women and men, and focused on addictions and physical, emotional and sexual abuse.

Participants also discussed ways to establish and maintain positive relationships with service providers, police and other community members.

Peter Constant, a certified Indigenous addiction’s specialist with the Cree Nation Tribal Health Centre, says the stigma attached to domestic violence often causes those who experience its effects to suffer in silence.

“The workshop was needed to bring more awareness about the impacts and the prevalence of domestic violence in our communities,” says Constant “Sharing personal experiences gave the participants a real understanding of how domestic violence has impacted the lives of the people who shared their personal struggles.”

During one session, Harnum spoke to participants about coping skills, such as knowing when to walk away from difficult situations and how to de-escalate confrontations.

“The Moose Lake workshop was an ideal format,” says Dawna Pritchard, executive director of Aurora House, whose organization sent three employees to the workshop. “It was community-led and local resources were used, which demonstrated a collaborative partnership between law enforcement and support services.”

FINDING SOLUTIONS

Harnum describes one couple who would frequently call the RCMP to come and settle arguments and violent confrontations because of one partner’s drinking.

The constable says the couple participated in the workshop and, although the drinking continues, there is a glimmer of hope it may improve the pair’s relationship.

In the weeks following the sessions, Harnum says he started to get calls from the pair as they tried to work through their issues.

“They’ve realized that they can’t be arguing and fighting like this all the time. So their situation turns into a simple phone call where we chat, rather than me responding to a call for service. To me that’s a win,” says Harnum, who adds that he hopes to hold three to four workshops annually.

Pritchard adds it’s also about making connections with the community.

“Every opportunity to connect in person helps build relationships — so even if they attended the workshop’s sessions, but they’re not a victim, the participant would feel more comfortable about referring a friend or family member to us,” says Pritchard, adding her praise for the organizer.

“Cst. Harnum’s work made a huge leap in re-establishing a positive and constructive relationship between community members, support agencies and police services,” she says. ■

COMMUNITY OUTREACH
COVER

UNDERSTANDING AUTISM

POLICE AND SUPPORTERS WORK TO CALM THOSE IN DISTRESS

By Paul Northcott

Advocates have long known people with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) have regular exchanges with police. And now awareness training is helping some RCMP officers better recognize and help those with autism.

In 2017, Lunenburg County RCMP in Nova Scotia received a spike in autism-related calls. Many officers' questions went to now-retired Cst. Rod Francis. He has first-hand experience with autism because his teenage son lives with the condition.

"I'm very familiar with ASD and how to deal with it," says Francis, who in late 2017 helped organize ASD training sessions for colleagues.

He saw the benefit of those efforts months later at a local school, where a colleague helped an autistic teenager.

"He just wasn't getting his own way and he was upset," says Francis, who added the officer was calm, gave the teen lots of space and was able to get him to sit at his own desk, which helped diffuse the situation.

FIRST STEP IS AWARENESS

The training was also sparked by a lack of autism awareness.

"A lot of the time, as police officers, when we get a call, the information we get is that it's a 13-year-old at home out of control. We may not be aware that they have ASD. As a result, we're going in there with a high-risk assessment that doesn't help," says Francis.

A 2017 study by the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH) and York University found that while almost half of interactions with police were calming, nearly one-third had the opposite outcome.

Yona Lunskey, who has extensively studied autism and co-authored the study, says police and other first responders need to recognize the challenges involved.

"There are so many autisms," says Lunskey, a senior CAMH scientist.

ASD is a lifelong, developmental disability that affects how those with autism communicate and relate to other people, and how they experience the world.

Lunskey says autism can, among other things, be severe or mild, it may be diagnosed



Police encounters with people who have Autism Spectrum Disorder can be difficult. Some officers have taken training to better recognize and help those with autism.

Leann Parker, RCMP

very early on in life or it may not be diagnosed until adulthood. It may or may not be associated with an intellectual disability. As well, difficulties with social communication may be subtle or a person may not be able to verbally communicate at all.

Lunskey also notes autistic individuals are more likely to be victims of crime.

"So police have to be aware of that too and have the same sensitivities when supporting them," she says.

REACHING OUT

In British Columbia's Lower Mainland, RCMP S/Sgt. Major Stephen Blair Hurst has helped train hundreds of officers in ASD awareness with the support of the Pacific Autism Family Network.

"We discuss scenarios you may encounter and behaviours," says Hurst, who describes a fictitious call for service involving a young man with ASD in a parkade who's wearing a hoodie, carrying a backpack and looking into car windows.

He says when police arrive and identify themselves, the individual may ignore them. "The officers could interpret this as someone who may be attempting to break into ve-

hicles or as a suspicious male who is avoiding contact with police," he says.

But, he adds, the scene could also be a non-verbal male with ASD who has sensory issues.

"His communication style and ability may be one where he's not comfortable making eye contact and he may be non-verbal," says Hurst. "We don't expect our members to make a diagnosis. But the more we know about ASD indicators and the behaviours, the better it's going to be, and awareness is key."

Lunskey, who holds a PhD in clinical psychology, says it's essential police reach out to the autism community for solutions.

"It's really important to get to know people to understand their autism and to know them when they're not in crisis," she says.

Lunskey says there's always an opportunity for first responders to learn more about ASD.

"Every time people with autism have a bad experience, it affects how they deal with police the next time," she says. "Even after there's an encounter, police still have an opportunity to say: How can we do better? What support can we give you next time?" ■

COVER

COMMUNITY OUTREACH



SOFT TOUCH

THERAPY DOGS LOWER ANXIETY FOR VICTIMS

By Patricia Vasylychuk

For victims of crime, especially children, interacting with a therapy dog can ease stress and anxiety that often accompany the experience of retelling tragic personal experiences.

The presence of a dog at the feet of a victim has shown to reduce heart rate and blood pressure, and regulate breathing, helping the person better think through questions and give a more accurate account of what happened to them.

“This will benefit the RCMP entirely because our investigators will get better statements in the beginning, and that will lead to better testimony in court and a higher likelihood that a conviction will happen,” says Cst. Holly Erb, program manager for the Victim Services Unit in Red Deer, Alta.

CALMING PRESENCE

In May, after a two-year wait, Red Deer RCMP Victim Services hired its first K9 staff member. Harley, an affectionate black Labrador retriever, celebrated his second birthday by laying his head gently in the lap of a seven-year-old victim as she told her story to police.

“Any time children, or anybody, come to a police station, they’re usually not there for something that’s good,” says Harley’s handler, Susan Bontje, who’s also a full-time administrative assistant with the unit. “Having him sitting there just seems to be a calming thing — that maybe this isn’t such a scary place.”

During an interaction with a therapy dog, participants might touch and cuddle the dog, or simply carry out activities while the dog sits nearby.

Of all of Harley’s clients, children appear to benefit the most from his presence. Bontje says Harley instinctively senses when someone is in emotional distress and lays on their feet.

Harley works the same hours as his handler — Monday to Friday, 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Though he’s allowed to walk about when he wants to, Harley spends most of the day resting quietly on a mat beside Bontje’s desk. Throughout the day, he entertains detachment employees and visitors, but is really at his best when a victim of crime comes in for an interview or to prepare for court.

“A person who’s traumatized by a crime

already has a heightened emotional baseline,” says Erb. “So if we don’t have Harley, or any therapy dog, there to help bring down those stress symptoms then they would have a much more traumatic time going through the criminal justice system. And I believe that that trauma would just extend through the rest of their life.”

For now, the unit in Red Deer is only accepting requests for Harley’s services in court from Crown prosecutors in the city, but hopes to expand to surrounding areas in the future.

NON-JUDGMENTAL SUPPORT

At the RCMP’s Nanaimo detachment in British Columbia, no one was able to take on the full-time duties of a dog handler. So, in the spring of 2017, Nanaimo Victim Services began a partnership with St. John Ambulance for the use of the organization’s volunteer therapy dogs.

Now, every Monday afternoon, Hudson, a six-year-old Golden Doodle, spends two hours sitting calmly and greeting passersby in the lobby of the detachment. In addition to the weekly drop-in to the detachment, the unit also requests therapy dog services as needed for specific assignments.

“The dogs are non-judgmental, they show unconditional love, and they’re there to provide that support that many others can’t,” says Cheryl Zapotichny, program manager of Nanaimo RCMP Victim Services. “There’s just a magic with them.”

Zapotichny recalls one incident when a dog’s presence calmed a particularly distraught victim and helped her effectively communicate her thoughts to support staff.

“There was some crying and worrying when she first arrived, but when she was able to pat the dog and talk to the dog, you could see that easing up,” says Zapotichny. “The crying stopped and she was able to do what she needed to do to get through that moment.”

Just like Harley’s good temperament and natural ability to sense people’s emotions, a good therapy dog must also be calm, keen, eager to work, comfortable in public and be able to shake off the negative energy from the day, says Doreen Slessor, executive director for the dog therapy school Dogs with Wings.

While some organizations, like Dogs with Wings, breed the animals to have these particular traits, others recruit dogs from shelters, or, as in Harley’s case, retrain dogs from other therapy programs. ■



Using therapy dogs in police interactions with victims has been found to reduce victims’ heart rate and blood pressure, and regulate breathing.

RCMP

COMMUNITY OUTREACH
COVER

just THE FACTS

BUY-AND-SELL CRIMES

Online buy-and-sell sites have become the fastest and most convenient way to sell, purchase or exchange items, advertise services or events, and even find jobs. **But buyer and seller beware.** Besides the many honest deal-makers out there are those who will take advantage of customers.

Common buy/sell crimes:

- > selling counterfeit or stolen items
- > phishing for personal and banking information with the intent to commit fraud
- > robbery/assault/murder during an exchange



Common deceitful job ads:

- > mystery shopper
- > human resources or admin
- > financial receiver or agent



IN 2017

The Canadian Anti-Fraud Centre received **8,134 complaints** of solicitations of internet fraud:



492 = **\$3 million +**
victims related to fake job posts worth of loss

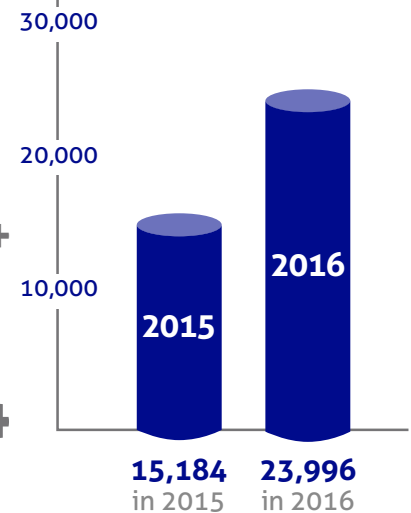


6,000 = **\$15 million +**
victims connected to buy-and-sell sites worth of loss



115 = **\$356,454**
victims of buying counterfeit items worth of loss

Although rare, violent cyber-related incidents like physical assaults are **on the rise in Canada.**



Vehicles



Bikes



Boats



Firearms

REPORTED STOLEN

Entered into the Canadian Police Information Centre database, in which the public may search an item's identification number.



The RCMP in British Columbia are the latest to encourage the public to use the area in front of their local police detachments to meet with buyers or sellers. The **video surveillance and presence of police in these safe zones will discourage any crooked deals or ill intentions.**

Compiled by Patricia Vasylichuk



RIDEAU HALL

GUARDING DIGNITARIES THROUGH TEAMWORK

Martine Chénier, RCMP



Sgt. Louis Brousseau and reserve Cst. Michel Sorel wait for the Governor General at Rideau Hall.

By Patricia Vasylchuk

Surrounded by 79 acres of trees and gardens, in an area restricted to the public, the RCMP detachment at historic Rideau Hall in Ottawa, Ont., is home base for Canada’s political bodyguards — the Governor General Security Detail (GGSD) and the Very Important Persons Protection Detail (VIPPD).

The GGSD protects the Governor General and her immediate family, while the VIPPD provides security for Canadian and foreign dignitaries, including ambassadors and chief justices, as well as international visitors, such as heads of state. The unit is also responsible for site security at events attended by the Governor General and Prime Minister.

The building where the two teams work is located behind, and to the left of, the Office of the Secretariat of the Governor General.

The ground floor, once the chauffeur’s garage, where horses and carriages were kept, now houses a fleet of black SUVs. The façade of the original building remains untouched, but the small, outdated space was retrofitted and renovated this spring, adding much-needed room.

ROOM TO MOVE

“We were cramped with boxes everywhere,” says Insp. Jean-Pierre Huard, the officer in charge of VIPPD and GGSD. “Now, we’re

proud to come to work here. We have a sense of belonging.”

Other Rideau Hall occupants include the Governor General’s office, the National Capital Commission, which manages the property, and now, the Prime Minister, his family and protective detail.

To accommodate Prime Minister Justin Trudeau’s temporary stay, officers have increased security on the grounds, adding more cameras, commissionaires and officers, both uniformed and in plain clothes.

For everyone working on the grounds of Rideau Hall, teamwork is the glue. Once or twice a month, all partners meet to discuss upcoming events, initiatives, and health and safety on the property.

“We share our resources, expertise and information,” says Sgt. Louis Brousseau, who’s in charge of operations for the GGSD unit. “Working together is the only way we can make it happen.”

Unexpected changes to the schedule are part of the job at the detachment and officers and reservists must adapt quickly and be flexible in having to reschedule personal plans, work overtime, or travel on short notice.

“Sometimes my wife isn’t happy with all the travel, but it goes with the job, you get used to it,” says Brousseau.

In his 20 years working private protection, Brousseau has served three Canadian

governors general.

For members of the VIPPD, what they do in a day is often dictated by global events, says S/Sgt. Richard Martel, who has been in charge of VIPPD with the detachment for almost two years.

“If there’s a terrorist attack in France, there’s a good chance that we’re going to have to protect the French ambassador here,” says Martel.

In addition to the ever-changing nature of close protection, Martel says another challenge is meeting the demands of foreign dignitaries who have specific preferences for security detail, such as types of security vehicles.

To make it all come together, Martel and his team work closely with Global Affairs Canada, which hosts the visitors and works with the foreign government and RCMP on the dignitary’s protection requirements.

“I’m just a security guy, I don’t know anything about protocol,” says Martel. “So they educate us every time we have a visit, and make it very easy for us.”

CHANGE AND ADAPT

The thing that makes no two days on the job the same, is also what Martel loves the most.

“We become junkies with this stuff — it’s the best job in the world,” he says, recalling how driving Portuguese Prime Minister Antonio Costa left a big impression.

The pair were headed to a public event when a potentially risky situation caused Martel to turn to Costa and suggest he alter his plans as a precaution.

“It’s not every day that you get to talk to a head of state like he’s your co-worker,” says Martel.

Costa complied with his recommendation without hesitation and, before returning to Portugal, shook his hand and thanked him.

“He was very gracious,” says Martel. “I was very impressed by that.”

For Brousseau, it was a trip to Israel with former governor general David Johnston that remains a highlight of his career.

“We went to occupied territory,” says Brousseau. “That was very interesting to see both sides of the fence and learn about this historical place.” ■

ALERT AND READY

IN-FLIGHT OFFICERS TRAIN FOR ANY THREAT

By Paul Northcott

For almost two decades, trained Canadian in-flight security officers (IFSO) have flown on selected high-risk domestic and international commercial flights, usually without incident.

But before an IFSO steps on a plane, he or she has gone through a rigorous application process including physical and psychological testing and a comprehensive file review.

Once accepted, officers train for a month in behavioural analysis, close-quarter combat and firearms drills, hostage negotiation and bomb disposal. Then, after becoming a certified IFSO and boarding a flight — whether for three or 13 hours — that officer is watching and observing everything.

“There’s no such thing as routine when you’re on a flight,” says Insp. Tim Evans, who served as an IFSO on hundreds of flights in the early 2000s. “You’re always aware.”

Established in the wake of the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, IFSOs operate under the Canadian Air Carrier Protective Program (CACPP). The initiative safeguards air travellers by putting armed officers onboard selected Canadian-registered domestic and international passenger flights.

In a rare move, CACPP officials earlier this year provided members of the media a tour of their Ottawa-area facility, which features a decommissioned aircraft where the security officers are put through a variety of mock hostage-taking and terrorist situations.

STOPPING THE THREAT

“IFSOs are taught to stop the threat and they react until the threat is neutralized,” says one instructor, who can’t be identified. “We don’t shoot to slow down, we shoot to kill. And the officer still has to keep their wits about them.”

At the combat training gym, members engage in hand-to-hand fighting, and practise how to disarm opponents armed with a knife or gun. But there’s another important aspect that’s not immediately clear.

“We do many combat scenarios, but a lot of this has to deal with mental tough-

ness,” says an IFSO trainer. “And they need to be ready for whatever comes their way.”

The number of IFSOs with the unit is closely guarded information. But the dangers those officers are trained to deal with are well known and evolving.

“The No. 1 risk is person-delivered IEDs (improvised explosive devices) on body or in baggage,” says Supt. Janis Gray, the program’s director. “What we have now, too, which we didn’t have when the program was created, is high-risk returnees — foreign fighters.”

NEW RISKS

More airplanes and passengers in the sky are also putting additional demands on IFSOs.

Gray says commercial aviation is growing in this country and, as a result, more Canadians are travelling to high-risk destinations. She adds that one of her goals is to expand the program, not only in terms of numbers, but also diversity.

“We need to blend in with the clientele that are on the flight. If we’re to remain covert and discreet, we need to mix it up a little bit. It also enhances officer safety because they’re blending into the environment,”

says Gray, who notes all of the officers are trained in developing a cover story.

IFSOs — who must have their skills recertified every six months — commit at least three years to the program.

“Three years is enough for some people,” says Gray. “It’s very demanding on family and social life. However, some people want to and do stay longer.”

Evans left the program after five years, but he says the work to become and remain an IFSO was very appealing. “You have this opportunity to get this tactical training that will benefit you,” he says. “It will teach you mental awareness that can help members later in their career. I went in as a constable and was promoted to corporal. It isn’t a dead-end job.”

It’s a sentiment a current IFSO officer shares.

“For some people it may not seem appealing. But when you don’t fly, you’re always training with top-of-the-line instructors and you get to represent the interests of the organizations and your country,” the officer says.

“We’re paid not just for what we do, but for what we can do.” ■



Serge Couin, RCMP

The RCMP’s in-flight security officers are trained to protect the crew and passengers on selected high-risk flights. Their training includes scenarios such as the mock takedown of a terrorist with a hostage on board a plane.



DRAWING OUT SUSPECTS

ARTIST'S SKETCHES SOLVE CRIMES

Cst. Alexandre L'Heureux is one of two full-time RCMP forensic sketch artists. The former track star didn't know what to do with his life when injury derailed his Olympic aspirations in 2007. However, a chat with his dad, a former Montreal-area municipal police officer, changed everything. Paul Northcott spoke with L'Heureux about his career, which he describes as the best job in the RCMP.

HOW DID YOU GET INVOLVED IN FORENSIC SKETCHING?

Through sheer luck. I had no idea this position even existed when I joined the RCMP. I was a designer for an architecture firm following my college days and I've always done fine arts on the side. Drawing people and faces is nothing new to me. It was very early in my RCMP career, I don't think I had two years of service, when I met (retired forensic artist) Michel Fournier. He asked me if I could draw and I said I would like to. So then I worked as an alternate artist for a couple of years. I started in 2012 working under him and he mentored me.

TELL ME ABOUT BECOMING FULL TIME. DID YOU JUST SUBMIT DRAWINGS TO GET THE JOB?

You know that's exactly how it was, and I did three drawings. You have to draw faces without looking at anything and you have to be able to draw a face from description. You also have to be a good interviewer and in the Atlantic region you have to be bilingual. Ninety per cent of this process is interviewing the person for the sketches. If you don't relate with the person in front of you, you're not going to get a good result. I had that ability to speak with people and, most importantly, get their trust.

HOW DO YOU GET THE INFORMATION FOR YOUR SKETCHES?

When a person needs to be identified, and we have a witness, I'm contacted by the lead investigator and we set up a meeting with the witness. It's important that the witness is co-operative and willing to work with me. I'll then go through some mental exercises to jolt the memory and I'll ask them

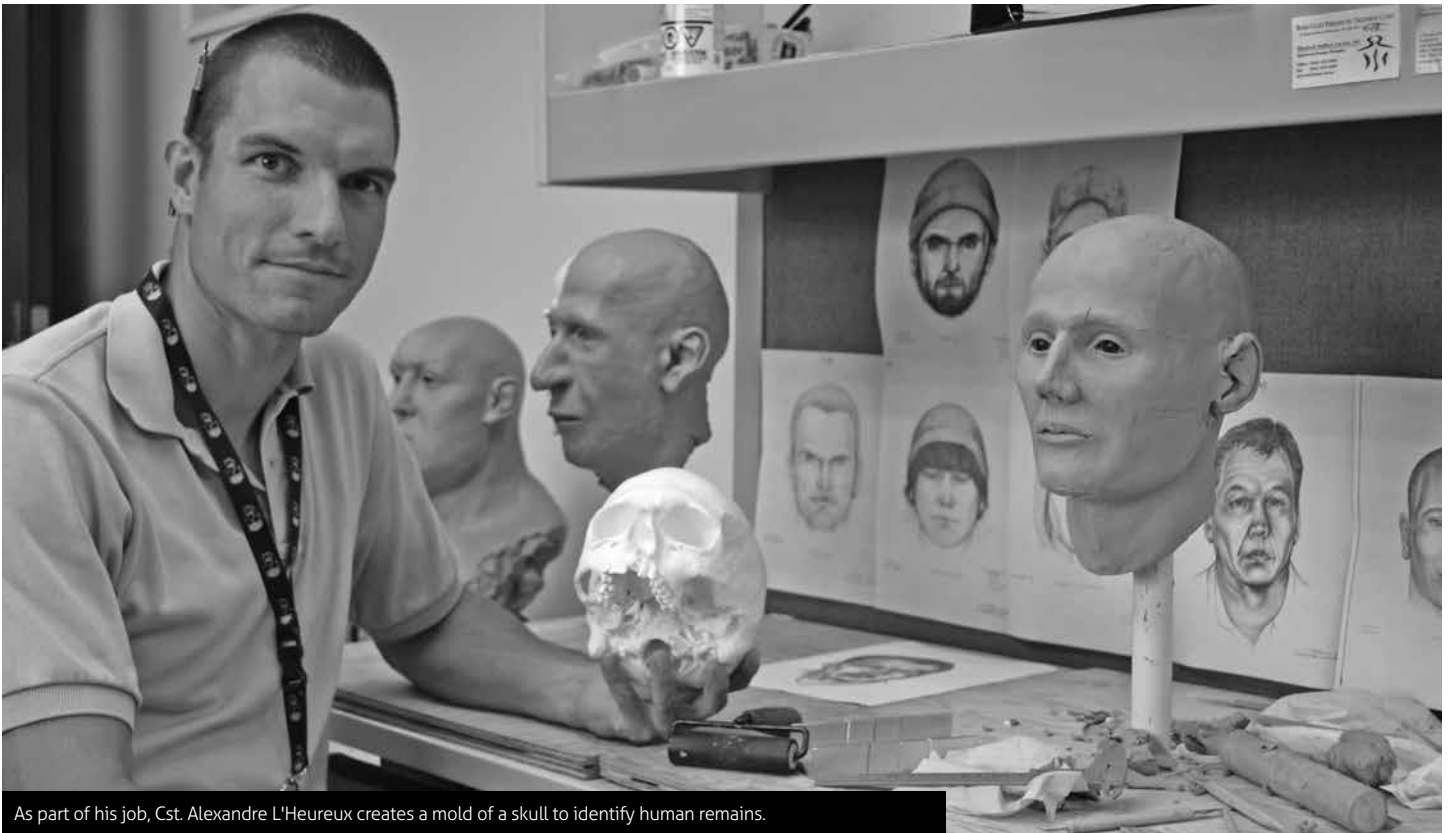
to describe what took place, and to add as much detail as possible. I also ask for a verbal description of the person, and will give the witness a book of visual aids that shows different facial features. Hopefully, the witness will then pick certain features that triggers their memory.

As the witness goes through the visual aids, I'll start to draw. When the witness sees the drawing, they will make a mental comparison from what they see to what they remember. From there, I work with the witness to make the necessary changes until they're satisfied that they can no longer do anything to make the sketch better. What we get is an approximation of the person of interest. In some cases, the results are very accurate.

WHY DOES THE RCMP NEED SKETCH ARTISTS?

We deal with pretty serious crimes, where there's no identified suspect or person of interest. This is the case in many investigations throughout Canada — we have a crime but we don't have a name or suspect.

Courtesy of Alexandre L'Heureux, RCMP



As part of his job, Cst. Alexandre L'Heureux creates a mold of a skull to identify human remains.



We're the last resort to further any investigation. Every time I get a call, it's because they (investigators) have done everything they can and there's no information coming in — there's no identified suspect. If we don't solve these crimes, it can be very frustrating. And we're also not helping the public if we're not doing everything we can to further our investigation.

CAN YOU RECALL ANY MEMORABLE CASES?

We help out municipal forces and about two or three years ago, I got a call from Edmundston Police. They had this lady who was a victim of an assault, and her story was all over the place. It happens from time to time that people will give a false complaint, so it's our job to determine if the person is telling the truth. As I spoke with this woman, everything just fit. I determined she was telling the truth, so I did a sketch and they caught the individual two weeks later. He admitted everything. The suspect was found guilty of assault and that was very gratifying.

YOU DO MORE THAN SKETCHES. WHAT IS FACIAL RECONSTRUCTION?

If DNA or dental records can't identify the person, the human remains come to me. Then I work with anthropologists to find out as much detail about the individual as we can: sex, age, anything that can help in the reconstruction. Then I do a mold of the skull, and if it's not clean I clean it — basically I'll boil the head with a solution, then I'll take off all the tissues around the face. Once I have that copy of the skull, I'll apply tissue markers. They describe the depth at which the muscle, the blood vessels . . . everything that's attached from the surface of the skull to skin. Then I'll put in glass eyeballs and sculpt the entire face out of clay to create a very educated approximation of what the person would have looked like. I've only done two of these in my career.

HOW DO YOU COPE WITH THAT TYPE OF WORK?

When I joined the RCMP, I was afraid of blood. When I was at Depot (RCMP Training Academy), my teammates would tell me to look away. One day I was brought to see an autopsy. It was the kick in the butt I needed and after that, I was able to deal with



As one of only two forensic sketch artists in the RCMP, Cst. Alexandre l'Heureux draws faces from witness descriptions to help solve cases.

human parts and every scenario you can imagine. Now I have dealt with death ever since and I'm not bothered by it anymore. I can handle human heads in my hands, touch dead flesh, and do the things we don't particularly enjoy doing. It's not something I ever imagined myself doing, but we have a lot of human remains in Canada that are just waiting to be identified. Reconstruction is a crucial tool that we have to identify these people so the families can have some closure and pay their respects.

TELL ME ABOUT ONE OF THE CHALLENGES OF THE JOB?

A lot of the time when we have surveillance footage, the quality is very poor and very pixilated, so it's very hard to make out who the individual is. I developed a new technique to identify people from video surveillance. In one case we had this person who was stealing tractor trailers, and we had one little slice of a picture. It was horrible quality and there was a time stamp on his forehead. I took out the time stamp with skin colour. Then I blew up the part of the face that I had on an eight by 11 sheet of paper. From there, I traced the outline of the hairline, the nose, the eyes and then I did a sculpture — sculpting from that

same angle as the picture. I made a sketch for investigators to use and the drawing was instrumental in the arrest of the individual.

WILL YOUR WORK BECOME OBSOLETE ONE DAY?

No. First of all, there are only so many cameras you can put up, even in urban areas. Here in the Atlantic region, we work in a lot of rural areas. Many of the crimes that happen are residential and not everyone has security cameras. And even if they have a camera, it doesn't mean the quality of the images will be any good and adequate enough to identify an individual.

HOW OFTEN DOES YOUR WORK LEAD TO ARRESTS?

Even if you have a solid drawing of an individual, it's what we do with that sketch that matters most. Distribute a sketch through the media, and you will get a 100 calls. Out of these, you might just get lucky and have one that will send you in the right direction. In general, our results are 50/50. But it's just like fingerprints: you might have 10 successes in a row and then have 10 that lead nowhere. In the end, it's all about teamwork and doing everything we can to help those we serve and protect. ■



FROM TRACKING TO TREATS

LIFE IN RETIREMENT FOR RCMP SERVICE DOGS

Courtesy of Cpl. Ryan Drohomereski



Retired service dog Astro enjoys a break from playing with the family.

By Patricia Vasylychuk

When RCMP service dogs retire, typically around age eight, it's into a life of leisure filled with toys, treats and copious cuddles, at home with their handler. In cases where the dog can't remain with the handler, it's rehomed to a trusted colleague or friend.

One such happy dog retired this spring, at age nine, after a six-year career as a tracker in British Columbia.

"Boomer will be my mountain-biking, hiking and fishing buddy from here on out," says Cst. Clay Wurzinger, who is a member of the Police Dog Services Unit in Nanaimo, B.C. He says the partners had a close bond that was strictly professional.

"Boomer was a working dog through and through. His entire existence seemed to revolve around a tracking harness and search rewards," says Wurzinger. "He didn't ever seek attention from me. I was merely the facilitator of fun and the driver of his truck."

Since retiring though, Boomer's personality has completely changed, says Wurzinger, who moved him inside to integrate with the family a few months before their last assignment together. Now, the German shepherd is more affectionate and at ease with loud noises that used to put him on edge, such as the phone ringing and cars passing.

The career of a service dog in the RCMP

typically begins between the age of 18 and 20 months, and ends after approximately five and a half to seven years, depending on how hard they work, injuries and illnesses. Typical life expectancy is between 10 and 12 years.

READY TO RETIRE

Wurzinger decided to retire Boomer last summer when he noticed the dog had less energy on hot days and was sore for longer after a difficult assignment.

"He was looking healthy and strong otherwise, but I didn't want to run him into the ground," says Wurzinger. "He didn't owe any more than he had given to anyone. He earned the right to a healthy, happy retired life, and it was time."

The decision about when to retire a dog is made between a handler and their K9 trainer, who retests the dog's performance each year during the length of its career. The time is right when the dog starts showing signs of fatigue, such as having less energy, resting and sleeping more, says S/Sgt. Grant Hignell, a policy manager at the RCMP's Police Dog Service Policy Centre in Innisfail, Alta.

But sometimes a dog's career is cut short because of an injury, most commonly to the joints.

Hignell, who has been a handler to seven dogs over the years, says he retired his latest partner, Chevy, at age seven, when he developed

sciatic nerve damage after close to six years of service specializing in narcotics detection.

"One day when he was out running, I threw a ball for him and looked back, and all of a sudden he was dragging his left leg, just running on three legs," says Hignell. Now he spends time throwing Chevy his favourite ball, which was also his preferred reward for completing tasks on the job.

"He learned very quickly, when I was cutting the grass, to drop his ball in front of the lawn mower so I'd have to stop and throw it for him," says Hignell.

STRONG BOND

Two years after his first service dog, Astro, had to be put down in May 2016, the bond between them still makes Cpl. Ryan Drohomereski emotional.

"He has his spot on our mantle. His ashes are waiting for mine," says Drohomereski, who works in the Police Dog Services unit in Prince Albert, Saskatchewan.

Drohomereski retired Astro at age seven after a six-year career specializing in explosives. Eleven months after working his last shift, the dog developed a rare form of rapidly spreading and painful skin cancer. He was euthanized less than two weeks after the diagnosis.

"We were hoping for a long retirement for him, but it just took him quick," says Drohomereski. "There was just no quality of life there."

Though it was short-lived, Astro took to retirement life well — camping and taking trips with the family. It took nearly two months for him to stop getting excited, expecting an assignment, when the phone rang. But as seasons passed so did his expectation to work.

"His routine, like any senior citizen, was get up in the morning, go to the bathroom, and sit on the couch all day," laughs Drohomereski.

Now, Drohomereski has a new partner. Corbin, a six-year-old German shepherd who began working with the officer when he was three.

Though they are close, Drohomereski says it is no match to the bond he shared with Astro.

"I miss him every day," he says. ■