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SAFE FROM HARM PREVENTING AND SUPPORTING YOUNG VICTIMS OF CRIME

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ON THE COVER:
The RCMP works with many agencies and organizations to help keep kids safe from harm.

Photo: RCMP





KEEPING KIDS SAFE

RCMP



It's an understatement to say child protection is important year round. But as a new school year begins and kids reconnect with their friends in person and online, it's a good time to put their safety and well-being on the radar — or perhaps, the smartboard.

For our cover, Travis Poland writes about the disturbing and growing trend of online child exploitation.

In his first story, Poland looks at the RCMP's Integrated Child Exploitation Units, whose members use multiple skills and techniques to uncover the worst offenders and save kids before more harm comes to them.

His second piece explores international efforts to locate victims and support investigations through the work of the Virtual Global Taskforce. Whether in Canada or abroad, collaboration between police agencies is critical to tackling this borderless crime.

Close partnerships also play a key role in identifying and stopping high-risk sex offenders who may be poised to reoffend.

Patricia Vasylichuk writes about the first case in which a Canadian convicted child sex offender was flagged and stopped from entering another country thanks to cooperation between the RCMP, the Canada Border Services Agency and authorities from the Dominican Republic. Sharing pertinent information about high-risk travellers helps prevent child exploitation that might otherwise slip through the cracks.

In Canada, the RCMP's National Human Trafficking Coordination Centre plays a key role in raising awareness and supporting victims of forced exploitation, many of whom are women and girls. And the truth is, no community is immune. Paul Northcott writes about a new national hotline, among other initiatives, recently launched to help trafficking victims across Canada.

We also feature the RCMP's use of the School Action for Emergencies Plan to help responders protect kids during a critical incident, and we speak to an RCMP child forensic interviewer about the skills and challenges of seeking the truth from young victims or witnesses.

In Just the Facts, we share recent statistics about cybercrime in Canada and how it affects young people in particular. We include simple tips for kids and parents to prevent and report cyber-related offences.

Finally, in our panel discussion, we ask two officers and two young people for their views on how police can best connect with kids and teens to help them make sound decisions on their own. Their answers range from playing a simple game of basketball to sharing eye-catching videos on social media.

We hope our stories offer sound reminders of the dangers out there but, more importantly, show the untiring police work being done to keep kids from becoming victims in the first place. ■

— Katherine Aldred

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NEW SOFTWARE IMPROVES MENTAL HEALTH RESPONSE

By Travis Poland

RCMP in Manitoba have a new tool to improve their response to mental health crises.

HealthIM, an application for computers and mobile devices, allows officers to input information about intoxication, emotional state, hallucinations and violence.

The application's brief mental health screener determines if someone is at risk of harming themselves or others, and informs officers' decisions on apprehension, a hospital visit or referral for community services.

"It's often a health problem and not a criminal problem, but we're the first contact," says Cpl. Nirmal Rukhra, who works at the RCMP's Portage la Prairie detachment. "This doesn't override an officer's judgement, but provides more information they may not have."

RCMP in Steinbach and Thompson, Man., and police in Winnipeg and Brandon are also using HealthIM.

Rukhra recalls responding to an individual threatening self-harm. After speaking with the person and family, and completing the HealthIM assessment, police determined that a hospital visit wasn't necessary and referred them to support programs.

"In the past, we may have been more cautious and taken them to hospital," he

says, adding that the referrals ensure there will be follow up.

Assessments take minutes and include historic information such as a previously completed HealthIM evaluation.

If a person requires hospitalization, HealthIM sends a report directly to the health-care centre, improving communication between police and hospitals.

"For harm reduction, it's most beneficial to a person in crisis for that communication to happen," says Brendan Sheenan, HealthIM's director of operations.

He adds that reports have information such as a person's sensitivity to touch and other factors, improving quality of care.

Since using HealthIM, police spend less time waiting in hospital with the person in crisis, which gives more time for other calls.

Nearly 20 police forces throughout Canada use HealthIM and that's expected to double this year.

The program applies an internationally accepted psychiatric assessment adapted by Ron Hoffman, a former police officer and professor. ■



Cpl. Nirmal Rukhra

Three RCMP detachments in Manitoba are using a new software to help police respond to people in crisis.

RCMP PROJECT AIMS TO REDUCE REPEAT BREAK-INS

By Patricia Vasylichuk

The RCMP in Alberta is working with local law enforcement officers and crime watch groups as part of a new crime-reduction strategy that it hopes will reduce breaking and entering.

In February, Alberta RCMP launched Project Lock Up to tackle the problem, where repeat hits on the same property make up one third of all break-ins in the province.

"Criminals keep coming back there so there's something about that property that makes it a good target," says Supt. Peter Tewfik, the officer in charge of crime reduction for the RCMP in Alberta.

As part of the project, Tewfik's unit is identifying areas that are hot spots for

breaking and entering and then sharing that information with its partners, which include groups such as Alberta Fish and Wildlife, Citizens on Patrol and Alberta Rural Crime Watch.

Armed with victim addresses, and names and photos of known repeat offenders, the groups increase patrols in problem areas.

Victims whose properties have been hit five or more times are visited by the RCMP.

Jennifer Kee is the crime reduction co-ordinator at RCMP headquarters in Edmonton. She travels all over the province assessing repeat victims' properties and giving advice on what they can do prevent another break-in.

She says the most common repeat break-ins occur on rural properties that

are unlit, unfenced, without security cameras and have multiple outbuildings, such as sheds or detached garages.

According to Kee, site visits take part of the workload off front-line officers who may have little time for follow-up.

"Doing site visits helps reduce rural crime and will have a positive effect on all detachments," says Kee.

Project Lock Up is based on two similar initiatives from the United Kingdom that resulted in a 30 per cent reduction in break-ins over three years.

Tewfik says he hopes Alberta will have similar results and will do a yearly assessment to gauge progress.

"It's too early to see any numbers but anecdotally I've been hearing really good things." ■



FITNESS SQUAD CONNECTS RCMP AND YOUNG PEOPLE

By Paul Northcott

What started as a way to connect with Yellowknife's youth and promote fitness has led RCMP officers to form deeper, lasting relationships with the city's young people.

Through the Fitness Squad, local RCMP officers and employees and a volunteer from Fisheries and Oceans Canada, conduct weekly one-hour workouts in four schools for students in Kindergarten to Grade 12. Activities include games of freeze tag, obstacle-course racing or more hard-core exercises such as squats, burpees and jumping jacks. The program was started last winter.

Mathieu D'Aigle says the workouts can be hard.

The Grade 12 student at École Allain St-Cyr says the noon-hour sessions also help kids understand the job of police officers.

"I think some people believe the RCMP just drive around and arrest people," says D'Aigle. "But because of the Fitness Squad, kids get to talk to the police, ask questions and see they do so much more."

Canada's physical activity guidelines



RCMP

RCMP employees in Yellowknife guide students through workouts to boost their fitness and open up the lines of communication.

recommend that children get at least 60 minutes of moderate- to vigorous-intensity physical activity daily.

Cpl. Charmaine Parenteau has witnessed how the program has evolved.

"The squad was started to promote fitness, but I think now it's helped instill trust between us and the kids," she says. "This has now opened up doors for us. We run together and talk together."

Insp. Alexandre Laporte is the officer in charge of Yellowknife detachment.

He's received positive feedback from the community about the program and adds it "provides a way for the RCMP to break down barriers while supporting recruitment efforts."

D'Aigle, for one, is focused on becoming an RCMP officer. He plans to write the entrance exam when he graduates high school.

"It's my dream," says D'Aigle. "I would love to come back to Yellowknife as an officer and work with young people here." ■

YOUTH RODEO PROGRAM BUILDS RIDERS' CONFIDENCE

By Paul Northcott

As a former ranch hand and member of the Musical Ride, Cst. Tyrone Potts knows a thing or two about horses.

That's one of the reasons why the RCMP veteran, who has spent the bulk of his more than 30-year career serving southern Alberta's Piikani Nation, started a youth rodeo program seven years ago.

"Horses are true therapy animals," says Potts, who has also experienced and witnessed pain in his life. "When people are around the animal, they start to feel better."

Riding is also fun and builds confidence, he says.

"You can do lots of things with the horse," says 13-year-old Keyawna Plain Eagle, who started riding with the youth rodeo three years ago. "But you can't let them think they're in charge. They have to know you're the boss."

Potts was abandoned as a young boy and is on leave because of a post-traumatic stress disorder diagnosis.

"I've seen so much trauma in my time — when I was young and in my years as a cop," says Potts. "So I wanted to create something that helped kids today."

Now once a week, Potts and a group of volunteers bring horses and steers to Crow Lodge Park on the reserve in the summer and to the arena at Pincher Creek, Alta., in the winter.

There, about 40 Indigenous and non-Indigenous students learn each week about riding and rodeo skills such as barrel racing or pole bending — an event that features a horse and rider weaving around a series of poles.

"We match horses with riders' ability," says Potts.

He adds that elders and other community leaders are recruited to talk to the kids



Cst. Tyrone Potts, RCMP

Young riders participate in the youth rodeo program on the Piikani Nation reserve in southern Alberta.

about the presence of drugs and alcohol in the community, bullying and even suicide.

Plain Eagle, who says she dreams of being in a rodeo herself one day, enjoys another element the elders often bring — stories about the past.

"I like it when the elders talk about the horses and life back in their time," says Plain Eagle. "I want to learn about our history and what our culture is all about." ■

PATROLLING ONLINE PREDATORS

INTEGRATED UNITS ACT FAST TO SAVE KIDS FROM HARM

By Travis Poland

Internet child exploitation units across Canada are getting more tips, using new technology and forging partnerships to combat online child sexual abuse imagery.

“When I started, we were doing a little more than 200 investigations a year,” says RCMP S/Sgt. Scott Lambie, who’s overseen the Saskatchewan Integrated Child Exploitation (ICE) Unit for nearly four years. “Now we’re looking at closer to 500 so it’s expanding very rapidly.”

Last year, the RCMP-run National Child Exploitation Coordination Centre (NCECC) received more than 61,000 complaints — a 616 per cent increase since 2014.

GLOBAL PARTNERSHIPS

To tackle the volume of cases, police work together while investigating online child sexual abuse imagery.

Integrated units, like many ICE units, contain RCMP and municipal police officers allowing forces to share resources on investigations.

“The co-operation allows us to be a province-wide police unit,” says Lambie, whose unit includes officers from Prince Albert, Saskatoon and Regina.

In British Columbia, the ICE unit created a provincial strategy to provide local RCMP detachments with training and guidance on online child exploitation cases. The approach helps B.C. ICE with its large case load.

“We’re trying to be proactive with our members so when they get these files they have the training and knowledge to investigate,” says Sgt. Natalie Davis, an investigator with the B.C. ICE unit.

Sharing resources is especially helpful when conducting searches.

“We’re looking for something as small as a memory stick and it’s important to have enough people to do a search, and gather and maintain evidence properly,” says Sgt. Chad Norman with the Newfoundland and Labrador ICE unit, which includes officers from the Royal Newfoundland Constabulary.

If officers find a device suspected to contain child sexual abuse imagery, forensic

technologists collect data and use software to scan the content. The program categorizes images to limit the time officers are exposed to the explicit materials.

Using specialized technology doesn’t mean investigators abandon traditional police work.

“You have to be a good interviewer, you have to be a good statement taker, you have to be a good search warrant writer and be able to follow the evidence,” says Lambie. “We use technology to help us.”

ONLINE UNDERCOVER

Tips to ICE units often come from the NCECC, which gets some information from the U.S. National Centre for Missing and Exploited Children. American websites are required to submit suspected illegal material to the centre.

While many investigations start as tips, ICE units conduct proactive enforcement posing as young people or like-minded predators on chat rooms, social media and many other online services.

“If they know there’s children on it, they will exploit the website to lure children or commit other offences,” says Davis.

The undercover operations are effective, but the work is demanding.

Officers must bring the work home and be ready to respond as their online persona any time.

“It requires the investigator to be flexible and they have to be well trained,” says Norman.

Throughout the operation, officers follow investigative protocol, avoid inducing an individual to commit an offence and keep their supervisor up to date.

“Almost all the files we get through this work are urgent and we need to deal with them right away,” says Davis. Due to the vast number of cases, police prioritize incidents where children face imminent danger. If they arise, police act fast.

When officers learned two Canadian children faced immediate danger, it was all hands on deck.

A few days after the tip came in, the Saskatchewan and Alberta ICE units rescued two children and arrested two people in cities 1,000 kilometres apart.

“We identified offenders and got the kids to safety in under a week,” says Lambie. “It was incredible.” ■



Using technology and special investigation skills, RCMP ICE units target those who prey on children online.



TROUBLING TRENDS

GLOBAL TASKFORCE CONFRONTS GROWING ONLINE CHILD EXPLOITATION

By Travis Poland

The RCMP is helping lead international efforts to keep kids safe as part of the Virtual Global Taskforce.

The taskforce, made up of 13 law enforcement agencies from across the globe, provides operational support, research and intelligence and training surrounding online child sexual exploitation.

The RCMP chairs the taskforce until 2021 and is working to increase proactive measures against online child sexual exploitation and develop a framework for investigator well-being.

RCMP C/Supt. Marie-Claude Arseneault, taskforce chair, says international collaboration is necessary when tackling the borderless crime.

“One country can’t do this work alone,” says Arseneault, who oversees the RCMP Sensitive and Specialized Investigative Services Branch. “It would be impossible.”

Incidents of online child sexual exploitation have proliferated. In 2017, Statistics Canada reported a 233 per cent increase in child exploitation incidents over the past decade.

PARTNERS IN PROTECTION

Due to the crime’s global nature, police forces often work together tracking down consumers and producers of the illegal content.

Officers share tips and work together to ensure one police operation doesn’t interfere with or duplicate another. It’s especially important in anonymous online places like the dark web.

“If we don’t collaborate, we can hurt each other,” says Arseneault. “A country might want to shut down a server while another is investigating a prominent offender. If that server is shut down, it can jeopardize the investigation.”

Cpl. Charity Sampson, a victim identification investigator with the RCMP National Child Exploitation Co-ordination Centre, says the process ensures efficient use of officer time.

“Any duplication is time that could be spent helping another child,” says Sampson.

Sampson says RCMP officers talk



The Virtual Global Taskforce provides operational support and training to help police save and protect kids from online sexual exploitation.

daily with international partners to provide awareness and share tips.

“Jurisdiction is often unknown and we need to collaborate to try to locate a victim,” says Sampson. “One country may take this part and another country will take that part, and together we solve a crime.”

The taskforce partners with about 20 industry and non-governmental organizations providing knowledge and technology in the fight against online sexual exploitation.

Attending the taskforce’s twice-annual meetings provides companies insights to the barriers police face and allows them to develop new technology and tools.

“Knowing what the operational realities are can open up these partners to decide what they can do differently,” says Roberta Sinclair, who manages the Strategic and Operational Services Unit of the RCMP Sensitive and Specialized Investigative Services.

Companies approach the taskforce when aiming to reduce the likelihood their platform and software are used for exploitative purposes.

“A lot of the industry wants to do something, but they’re limited in the tools they can develop because the material is illegal to possess,” Arseneault says.

Non-governmental organization partners provide the taskforce with insights to the reality of child sexual abuse around the world and share their research with law enforcement.

MAINTAINING WELLNESS

Officer well-being is a particular concern when confronting online sexual exploitation as investigators routinely encounter graphic images.

The taskforce is currently researching the stress and burnout among officers in internet exploitation units around the world.

The project includes an academic literature review and an international survey. It culminates with a report recommending promising practices for officer well-being.

“These recommendations are not particular to Canadian investigators or Australian investigators,” says Sinclair. “They are applicable across every country.”

The survey includes police personnel who currently or previously worked with online exploitation units.

“We know a lot of the impacts from working in these units might not come out until someone has left the unit or a few years later,” says Sinclair.

The research also looks at the positive aspects of working with the units.

“Normally you hear about the negatives, but we have heard working in these units can be very rewarding,” says Sinclair.

Sampson says her work identifying child victims makes it her most fulfilling job yet.

“Once you see a child in the worst moment of their life, you want to work tirelessly to rescue them,” she says. ■



RCMP



Cst. Jean-Philippe Dupont says when officers have positive interactions and honest conversations with kids, they are more likely to reach out for advice.

COVER

CHILD PROTECTION

WHAT'S THE BEST WAY FOR POLICE TO CONNECT WITH KIDS?

THE PANELLISTS

- Cst. Jean-Philippe Dupont, Youth Section, Burnaby detachment, British Columbia
- Jessica Redmond, National Youth Advisory Committee participant, Charlottetown, P.E.I.
- Adam Burns, RCMP Community Programs Officer, Bridgetown, N.S.
- Sophia Iligan, National Youth Advisory Committee participant, Edmonton, Alta.

Whether it's a harassing text, an abusive relationship or a dangerous drug habit, young people need the help of someone they can trust. But the first step is reaching out. We asked two RCMP officers and two young people for their take on what works — and what doesn't — when it comes to keeping kids and teens safe.

CST. JEAN-PHILIPPE DUPONT

To connect with the youth in Burnaby, B.C., we started to hold regular movie nights at the community police office. To attract them, we offered a lot of “good” food and a wide variety of movies.

Contrary to what people might think, we wear our full police uniform during these

events because we want young people to feel comfortable approaching officers when in need. These positive interactions in uniform can help with that.

After the movies, we see kids with their chocolate-covered smiles speaking highly of the RCMP officers in their community. Recently, while in a part of Burnaby often plagued with gangs and crime, I was approached by a mother of two who wanted to thank us for the work we were doing with the youth. At times, it's hard for people to know when someone truly cares but children can see when you're being genuine.

One of the best ways of reaching young people is to give them something they might like.

For younger children, we give them RCMP stickers, listen to their stories and answer some questions. They quickly come to trust us.

With the teenagers, or even adults, we adapt our approach. Instead of stickers, we will give them something they like. We find with teenagers, food usually works great!

We spend some time listening to them, asking about themselves and sharing our own stories.

We show our openness by answering their questions frankly. Most youth already know the information we are telling them — what they miss is perspective. They need a trusting adult to give them that perspective.



RCMP



Since young people are constantly checking their social media, having ads and posts that catch their eye can be educational without them even knowing it, says Jessica Redmond.

The *Youth Criminal Justice Act* states that police officers should “take reasonable steps to prevent youth crime by addressing its underlying causes, to respond to the needs of the young persons, and to provide guidance and support...”

We can’t spend one-on-one time with every person, but doing it once in a while helps build rapport and an officer’s reputation in their community.

A lot of young people have reached out to me because they heard from friends that I “was different” and that they could trust me.

I think it’s because I usually tell them this: “I know everyone has a reason for doing what they do, and I’m not going to judge your reasons, but we need to deal with the harmful behaviours.”

An officer who gives teens a stern warning is similar to the doctor who tells his insomniac patient they should get some sleep: it doesn’t fix the root cause of the behaviour.

Instead, I try to find out their reasons for doing something, then I tell them the reasons why I don’t do it. I find that when I’m real with them, they’re real with me.

JESSICA REDMOND

One of the strongest connections within any community should be between police and youth.

Since taking part in the RCMP National Youth Advisory Committee and attending the youth summit in Ottawa, I’ve gained a better understanding of how police can strengthen these bonds.

Officers need to ensure that they’re not only being noticed in each community, but that they’re making an effort to connect with young people. Creating that bond can take time but, if it’s done the right way, trust will be gained.

Officers need to ensure that they’re not only being noticed in each community, but that they’re making an effort to connect with young people. Creating that bond can take time but, if it’s done the right way, trust will be gained.

Taking the time to interact with kids and teens helps them to realize that you’re trustworthy and dependable. Small things — like shooting hoops with them or just asking them about their day — can make a huge difference. This will change their point of view from being nervous when police officers are around, to being excited when they come into the community.

When there isn’t a strong police presence, youth are more likely to become involved in dangerous activities such as drugs, bullying, violence and exploitation. Having police in communities gives kids another opportunity to talk to a trusted adult about things they’re unsure about, like drugs for example, and a person who they can count on.

and information in the school systems about substance abuse but there needs to be more.

If officers can give these youth presentations with real-life, eye-opening examples, it would be much more powerful than a simple talk.

Providing information that will always be in the back of their mind can help to steer them down the right path.

Using social media is critical. Since youth are constantly checking their social media, like Facebook and Instagram, having ads and posts that catch the eye and are attractive can be educational without them even knowing it.

Incorporating subjects that youth are interested in makes it easier for them to watch the entire ad and not skip over it or keep scrolling by. Child exploitation is on the rise and showing the risks on social media where they are most active, can help keep them safer.

One thing I would like to see is giving youth who want to pursue a career in policing a chance to shadow an officer. This is something that I would have loved to do when I was younger. A shadowing opportunity could show a young person what responsibility is and how staying on the right path — away from people they shouldn’t be around and illegal activities — can give them the best opportunities in life.

ADAM BURNS

Youth are in a constant battle between making the right and wrong choices. Staying positive and making appropriate decisions can be very hard to do. When a young person has no one to turn to and a lack of education or information, poor decisions often result.

The RCMP has an opportunity to fill some of those gaps by helping youth make smarter, informed decisions, and to be a voice of reason when they’re in need.

It’s very difficult for kids and teens to navigate all of today’s risks while receiving an education. Our avenue for building relationships to help them with everyday struggles starts and ends with pro-active engagement. This positive rapport-building allows us to make connections and create successful working relationships.

Putting ourselves out there and taking those extra few minutes to have positive interactions with youth is key. For RCMP Community Programs Officers and School Safety Resource Officers, this means mak-

CHILD PROTECTION

COVER

ing the effort after in-school presentations to talk with the classrooms, visit at recess or lunch, and help with breakfast programs.

Developing this relationship at the elementary level makes the process much easier. Whenever we visit an elementary school, we try to stay for recess or lunch. Students always run toward us and want to talk — in our profession, that’s a good thing!

In Annapolis County, we have two resources who spend most of their time in the schools. They are known by the students on a first-name basis, and have cultivated a level of trust within the schools. By nurturing this trust level — through presentations, programming and general interactions — we’ve found that youth reach out to us with their troubles or issues.

These students go home and pass on that positive interaction to family and friends — the benefits of which can’t be overstated.

When dealing with situations that may come up at the schools, we use them as teachable moments. Officers spend the time to come up with alternative measures, help the young person deal with the root cause of a problem and provide the resources they may need for follow-up.

One program we have in place is called Schools Plus, where we can take a youth’s profile and advocate for them to receive various resources available through the school board, mental health and addictions. This program helps us create an environment for the youth to succeed.

As I said, I believe that engagement is key. Yes, it takes time. However, the trust gained and the rapport created goes a long way.

Taking that time to stop the car and say “Hi” to a kid on the street, drop by local rinks or gyms to catch a bit of a game, or deal with a situation as a teachable moment, has real value.

When we engage, youth are more likely to heed our messaging on drugs, impaired driving, cyber bullying and so on. Taking the time saves time down the road.

SOPHIA ILIGAN

From my perspective, many youth today have a negative notion about the RCMP or police services in general, possibly due to a bad history or poor first impressions with them.

I believe that the best way to connect with young people is to rekindle the relationship between police and kids. To feel safe with police officers, we need to build trust between us.

I find that it’s easier to build a connection and trust with someone if they’re my friends. I feel like if we built our relationship with the police as friends instead of “trusted adults,” it would help us become more comfortable in approaching them.

One way to do that would be for police to sponsor and engage in youth events — whether it’s a meet-and-greet with local police or a monthly basketball game together. Actively interacting with young people will help them get to know their local officers and, in turn, police can get to know youth in their community.

In terms of convincing kids to do what’s right and safe for them, it would be more powerful to have the officer’s advice turn into a question or a statement while providing data alongside it.

For example, with drug and substance use, having a 15-second video showcasing a teenager’s reaction after being peer pressured, providing statistics on how many youth are affected, then ending the video with the question “Is this the kind of influence you want to make?” or even a statement like, “Before you try, think about the con-

sequences.” This helps us think twice before doing something we might regret.

Rewording advice into questions and statements lets young people have a choice and allows us to think for ourselves about serious consequences instead of having to listen to advice that we may not want to take.

Advertisements on social media platforms like Instagram, Snapchat and Facebook are very influential, especially when the content is eye-catching and short.

These days, a lot of youth have short awareness spans so it’s best to convey everything within 15 seconds, then have the resources or a link at the end or in the caption to lead us to more information. This creates an efficient connection.

Presenting statistics and data on youth crime in classrooms and on orientation days, as well as providing resources on how to help, would grab attention. It’s also important for police to convey on both social media platforms and in live presentations what they do for youth and how they do their best to help.

Getting feedback through surveys about how officers can best engage with young people and build trust could really help rekindle our relationships — slowly, but surely. ■



Sophia Iligan suggests that rewording advice into questions gives young people a chance to think for themselves.



READY TO RESPOND

SCHOOL ACTION FOR EMERGENCY PLANS INCLUDE VITAL INFORMATION

By Travis Poland

If a school faces a serious threat, the RCMP has a plan to keep it safe.

The School Action for Emergencies plan, also known as SAFE, provides critical information and response plans for nearly 5,000 schools in RCMP-patrolled areas.

A computer database contains site-specific content to help first responders during a critical incident such as an active shooter, bomb threat or hostage situation.

“All the important information is at your fingertips,” says RCMP S/Sgt. Jeff Comeau, detachment commander in Melville, Sask.

Aerial photos, floor plans and road maps help with situational awareness during a high-stress response.

Information such as the location of security cameras, fire alarm details and utility hookups are also in the plan.

Knowing what’s in and around the school allows officers to close roads and establish staging areas, medical stations and a place for media and parents.

“This would prevent everyone rushing to the school and creating confusion when we’re already dealing with a volatile situation,” says RCMP Sgt. Shawn French, who guides the SAFE program in Alberta.

SAFE, launched in 2007, is always expanding as new schools are built or building layouts change.

“There’s been two high school shootings in the recent past, Taber, Alta., in 1999 and La Loche, Sask., in 2016. We want to make sure we’re prepared,” says Alex MacKenzie, a public service employee supporting Alberta RCMP community policing.

FULL CONSULTATION

RCMP officers craft SAFE plans through thorough consultation with school employees and administration.

“It’s is a very labour intensive process,” says French.

The consultations can include custodial staff, who MacKenzie says can know more about a school’s infrastructure idiosyncrasies.

Officers review SAFE data annually keeping police up to date on any changes that



RCMP Sgt. Shawn French, right, and Alistair MacKenzie work together to ensure that School Action for Emergencies plans in Alberta are up to date in the event of a critical incident.

Kimberly Bosch, RCMP

could affect a response.

The updates ensure the topic doesn’t slip out of mind.

“It generates conversations with the school employees and with the officers at the detachment,” says Comeau.

For the plan, police meet with local first responders to understand their role during a critical incident.

“Local partnerships with fire and emergency medical services are daily factors in any police response and that’s the same for developing a SAFE plan,” says MacKenzie.

DISPATCHING DETAILS

Telecommunications operators can also access the plans, allowing dispatch to provide relevant material at a moment’s notice.

It can be essential in smaller detachments where all available officers may respond to an incident.

“They’re our lifeline during responses,” says Comeau. “If you’re a responding officer you may not have the luxury to pull that information up in the field.”

In some provinces, RCMP have organized training exercises based on SAFE plans. A mock critical incident is acted out and officers respond as if it’s the real deal.

“You don’t want to wait until there’s a problem to test your system to see if it

works,” says Comeau.

SAFE highlights points of interest that could pose risks to officer safety. If the school has a welding shop with compressed gases or hazardous chemicals in a science lab, for instance, the plan shows where they’re stored.

The data is crucial when officers respond with immediate action rapid deployment — an intervention technique stressing fluid risk assessment when contacting, confronting and subduing an active threat.

During emergencies, schools can enter lockdown or hold-and-secure.

Lockdown occurs when a school faces a direct threat and those inside take shelter until the situation is over.

When there’s an emergency situation near, but not related to a school, hold-and-secure has exterior doors locked while classes take place normally. No one can leave until it’s resolved.

Cpl. Dwayne Latham, national SAFE plan coordinator, says it’s important officers are familiar with the SAFE computer program and the crucial data it provides.

Latham often speaks with RCMP officers about how the program can be more effective.

“We’re always looking at what changes and updates can make it better for front-line officers,” he says. ■



THE HIGH COST OF HUMAN TRAFFICKING

MANY NEEDED TO HALT EXPLOITATION

By Paul Northcott

Human trafficking ruins lives.

That's why those battling to protect people at risk are continually looking for ways to educate the most vulnerable and rescue those forced into illicit activities.

"Criminals are learning, in my opinion, that it's more cost effective to traffic in people," says Cpl. Sue Harvey, a supervisor in Alberta's Indigenous Policing Unit. "If they're selling drugs, they have to keep importing them. But once they've lured say, young girls into prostitution, they just keep re-trafficking them and making money."

Human trafficking — which includes sexual exploitation, forced labour and organ trafficking — is one of the largest international illicit businesses. It generates around \$150 billion in profits annually, worldwide.

VICTIM SUPPORT

The RCMP — through its Human Trafficking National Coordination Centre (HTNCC) — develops and assists with new approaches to spread information about the forced recruitment, transportation and concealment of people for unlawful purposes.

"In Canada, the majority of our known cases are for the purpose of sexual exploitation with females being the most commonly victimized," says Cpl. Emilie Jones, acting non-commissioned officer in charge of the HTNCC.

She says 95 per cent of the HTNCC's cases involve domestic human trafficking for sexual exploitation.

The HTNCC assisted the Canadian Centre to End Human Trafficking with developing a 24/7 multilingual national human trafficking hotline, which became operational in May.

"The hotline plays a crucial role in the fight against human trafficking," says Jones. "It acts as a central mechanism for referrals and helps connect human trafficking victims and survivors with support."

Helping survivors of human trafficking get back home to their families is another important part of their recovery process.

The centre has an agreement with WestJet to provide free transportation to victims

of human trafficking so they can return home safely at no cost.

Jones says the HTNCC is working with other airlines on similar programs.

The centre's work also included a collaboration last October with the Ontario Provincial Police and 61 other law enforcement agencies, called Operation Northern Spotlight.

Investigators identified and provided support to people who officials suspected were being forced into the sex trade or who were at high risk of being trafficked.

YOUTH TOOL KIT

Raising awareness about human trafficking is another critical piece that's achieved through police presentations, theatrical plays and detailed information booklets directed at young Canadians.

Centre staff have distributed thousands of youth tool kits to interested organizations since they were introduced in 2012.

"It's the main tool we use in order to create awareness in the youth community," says Jones.

The tool kit, which explains the scope of human trafficking in Canada, was used during the 2018-19 school year by some Grade 12 students at Roland Michener Secondary School in South Porcupine, Ont.

It was part of teacher Chantal Guenette's Equity and Social Justice class after the students decided one of their major topics of the year should be human trafficking.

"The students started questioning: Was it even happening here?" says Guenette. "So I decided to give that question back to the class."

Local police visited the students and revealed that human trafficking cases are under investigation in the area. With information from the tool kit and their own research, the students organized an awareness campaign and presented daily morning announcements at the school.

"It's not a topic that has come up very much," Guenette admits. "But now the kids know it's everywhere and you can get sucked in before you realize it."

Harvey says those partnerships reflect the need to fight against human trafficking at many levels.

"It's a multi-jurisdictional issue that involves many organizations," says Harvey. "We need to recognize that people working in the sex trade, or those in the process of being deported, could be victims of human trafficking and need help before they get arrested or deported."

The national human trafficking hotline is 1-833-900-1010. ■



Two Roland Michener Secondary School students in South Porcupine, Ont., learned about human trafficking as part of their Equity and Social Justice class.



PARTNERS IN PROTECTION

UPDATES TO SEX OFFENDER ACT HELP AGENCIES SHARE KEY DETAILS

By Patricia Vasylchuk

For the first time last January, the RCMP helped stop a convicted child sex offender from entering another country. The move was possible thanks to updates to the act governing sex offenders — and good collaboration.

One day before the scheduled flight departed from Toronto to Sosua Bay, Dominican Republic, a known destination for transnational child sex offenders, officers at the National Sex Offender Registry (NSOR) and High Risk Sex Offender Program (HRSOP) determined the man was a high risk to reoffend, says the officer in charge of the unit, RCMP S/Sgt. Alain Gagnon.

In an effort to keep kids overseas safe, they notified the Dominican Republic authorities.

Gagnon says that when the offender touched down in the Dominican Republic, he was denied entry into the country and returned to Canada on the same plane.

“They could have just said ‘Thank you, let the guy come in’ or they could have watched him to see if he stays where he said he would be staying,” says Cpl. David Elliott, who oversaw the offender’s risk assessment. “But, thankfully, they accepted our assessment.”

Elliott is in charge of operations at

HRSOP. The program was created in 2016 to address amendments to the *National Sex Offender Information Registration Act*.

The act helps police prevent and investigate sex crimes by requiring convicted sex offenders to provide certain information to police at least once a year, and to be added to the sex offender registry.

REGISTRY RULES

As of January 2019, there are more than 51,000 registered sex offenders in the database, according to the latest numbers gathered by the RCMP, which maintains the registry. Of those, approximately 73 per cent are child sex offenders.

Once an offender makes the registry, they’re on it for life. Depending on their sentence, they must check in with police in person at least once a year for either 10 years, 20 years or life. Up to 80 pieces of information are entered into a database that’s available to Canadian and international law enforcement agencies.

Under the amended legislation, registered child sex offenders must also report their driver’s licence and passport information, and travel plans. Failing to comply could mean going back to prison.

“If they’re not reporting or reporting last minute, it’s a red flag for us because it shows a

mindset and indicates risk,” says Elliott.

Thanks to the updates to the act, if the unit determines an offender is high risk they may now share the information with their partner agencies including other police services — in Canada or abroad — and the Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA).

HIGH-RISK TRAVELLERS

Chad Barter is an intelligence officer with the CBSA. For the past two years, he’s been embedded with the RCMP in Ottawa, giving investigators relevant traveller information upon request.

As part of his partnership with the RCMP, Barter may disclose a myriad of information that’s normally protected under the *Privacy Act*. It includes air travel history, flight seat number, weight and number of luggage, hotel reservations and possible travel associates.

In the case from January, Barter discovered that the offender frequently travelled to child sexual exploitation hotspots.

This, combined with the results of the recidivism risk assessment, was critical in Elliott’s decision to flag him as high-risk.

At the request of the RCMP, Barter created an electronic message, called a lookout, which shows up on screen when someone goes through customs upon re-entering Canada. Each time, they will be taken to a room for questioning. Their belongings, including electronics, will also be searched for child exploitation images or other indicators of illegal activities while they were overseas, says Barter.

“If they operate anything like Canada, he’ll never enter the Dominican Republic again,” says Barter.

With between 2,500 and 3,500 new names added to the registry each year, Gagnon says it’s all the more important to continue working with partners, such as the RCMP’s National Child Exploitation Coordination Centre, to keep the registry accurate and up to date for officers investigating sex crimes.

“This is one of the most rewarding jobs I’ve had in my 29 years in the RCMP,” says Gagnon. “What we do makes a real difference.” ■



Karen Joyner, RCMP

With the help of partners such as the Canada Border Services Agency, the RCMP is working to keep kids overseas safe from convicted sex offenders.

CHILD PROTECTION
COVER

COMMUNICATING WITH KIDS

CHILD INTERVIEWERS BUILD RAPPORT WITH YOUNG VICTIMS OF CRIME

S/Sgt. Neal Fraser, RCMP



Cpl. Michelle Mosher interviews children during police investigations at the Caribou Child and Youth Centre in Grande Prairie, Alta.

Police interviewing is a delicate task. The search for the truth must be balanced with sensitivity for victim experiences. Interviewing children amplifies that challenge. Travis Poland spoke to Cpl. Michelle Mosher, a forensic child interviewer with RCMP Alberta's Serious Crime Branch, about her work with some of society's most vulnerable.

CAN YOU DESCRIBE YOUR JOB?

As a child forensic interviewer, I speak with children who have been victims or witnesses of crimes. In interviews, we try to collect as much information as possible for the investigation while trying to make the process less traumatizing for children. In an effort to conduct only one interview, I go in with the mentality that I have one shot to get it right. We don't ask leading questions and we ensure our questions are rooted in best practices for child forensic interviewing.

WHAT TYPE OF INVESTIGATIONS ARE YOU INVOLVED WITH?

Any type of investigation where a child is affected, especially serious crimes. We're primarily involved in investigations where

a child is a victim or a witness of sexual or physical abuse. We will interview children who are witnesses to domestic violence and victims crimes such as child luring and child pornography.

WHAT SKILLS ARE NEEDED IN THIS FIELD?

Strong interpersonal skills are important. You need to connect with children and have compassion and patience. Rapport building is essential to the interview and you must be understanding and a good listener. We want a child to feel comfortable talking to us and open up. Children should retell their story and know we won't be judgemental.

HOW DO YOU BUILD RAPPORT?

Before an interview, I'll talk with a parent or someone who knows the child about their interests to get an idea about the things they might like. I can pull from that as a starting point. If they say they like baseball, I get them to tell me what they like about it. I can ask them to recall a specific game, which provides examples of how I'll be asking questions later. We recently started using a therapy dog in

our interviews, which can give us a different focus to start with. When a child makes an important disclosure, it can be beneficial to say, "Thank you for telling me those things," as it lets them know it's OK to talk about it.

HOW DO YOU WORK WITH INVESTIGATORS?

We maintain a close relationship with a case's lead investigator, who explains all the case details. We outline the interview process for the investigator who monitors the discussion from another room. Following the interview, I introduce the lead investigator to the child. That way, if they see each other again, whether in court or in the community, they know each other. I support parts of an investigation such as suspect interviews and evidence presentations.

WHAT'S YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH CHILDREN'S SERVICES AND SUPPORT ORGANIZATIONS?

We have a strong association with children's and victim's services and court support workers at the child advocacy centre. Although our mandates are different, our main goals are the same. We want victims to have the support and services they need to be successful in life.

HOW OFTEN DO YOU CONDUCT INTERVIEWS?

At the Caribou Child and Youth Centre, where I work in Grande Prairie, Alta., we conducted more than 90 interviews in the first five months of 2019. The numbers always vary, but generally we get around three to five referrals a week. Last year, nine full-time interviewers across Alberta completed 1,200 interviews.

WHAT ARE SOME CHALLENGES OF THE JOB?

It's challenging knowing that abuse is still happening. We're proud we can help lead the way with child advocacy centres but we're always asking: How can we stop this from happening? How can we help provide support? It's a worthwhile field of investigations and there's still lots of work that needs to be done.

COVER

CHILD PROTECTION



Cybercrime is any crime where the internet, computers, tablets or mobile devices play a large role in committing the offence.

In Canada

Statistics Canada reports that the number of cybercrimes reported to police is on the rise.

In 2016, nearly **24,000** cybercrimes were reported to Canadian police.



In 2018, that number climbed to almost **33,000**

Connected kids

Youth are increasingly becoming victims and perpetrators of cybercrime.

By Grade 10, **87%** have a cellphone.

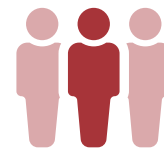


94% of youth have a Facebook account.

Criminal harassment and intimidation

According to PREVNet, a Canadian resource for bullying prevention:

25% of Canadian kids admit to cyberbullying.



1 in 3

say they've been cyberbullied.

Sexting

It's **illegal** to send sexual photos or videos of anyone who is, or appears to be, under 18 — this includes images of yourself.

Sexting by youth aged 12 to 17 is linked to other risk factors:



multiple partners



anxiety



depression



substance abuse

In Canada, young people of legal age have a right to share sexual images of themselves if:

- ✓ the image is sent voluntarily between consenting individuals who are close in age.
- ✓ the image stays private.
- ✓ the image doesn't depict abuse or assault.

Prevention

These tips can help guard against becoming a victim:



Don't share passwords and don't use the same password for multiple accounts.



Never reply to emails or texts that ask you to verify your information or confirm your user ID or password.



Set your social-networking profiles to private.



Think twice before you click on a link or a file.



Don't feel pressured by any emails or texts.



FLYING IN TO OXFORD HOUSE

NEW POLICING MODEL SPEEDS UP RESPONSE TIMES

By Patricia Vasylchuk

In only a few months, a change to the policing model in Oxford House, Man., has dramatically improved work and life for RCMP officers — and their relationships with residents.

Since February, officers posted to the remote fly-in community on the Oxford House 24 Indian Reserve in northern Manitoba, no longer need to live there permanently. Now, every second Wednesday, they fly in from their homes in Winnipeg, work for two weeks and fly back for two weeks off.

The detachment is the second in the province to transition to a fly-in policing model since 2017. A third will be transitioning next January.

The change aims to address the challenge of staffing remote locations such as Oxford House, where getting to and from the community is only possible by air most of the year. Between December and February, an ice road connects the reserve to a highway.

“With the old model, we were constantly suffering shortages, we had overworked employees, increased sick leave and burn outs,” says Detachment Commander Sgt. Jenny Melanson. She says most shifts had two fewer officers on duty than needed.

To cover all the work, such as guarding occupied cell blocks, officers would frequently have to come in on days off and shift around duties. Fewer officers on the road also meant slower response times and less community engagement.

SPARKING INTEREST

Those days feel like a lifetime ago for Melanson, who’s worked in Oxford House since 2016.

She says the fly-in model sparked a lot of interest and the detachment now has all 10 positions filled. More still are on a waiting list to work in the community where assaults and break-and-enters dominate police calls.

Now, at full staff and with more days off at a time, officers are feeling more rested and their new energy is helping them work better, says Cst. Jesse Stober, who worked at the detachment for two years starting in 2014 and returned last winter after hearing

about the change.

“Before, we couldn’t always get to the property crimes because we were dealing with the violent ones — that’s not fair to the victims,” says Stober.

He says officers now respond to calls faster and have more time for smaller cases such as broken windows and theft. In the winter, they also deal with frequent drug and alcohol-related offences. Ice roads make it possible to smuggle items into the dry community where they are prohibited by the chief and band council.

As well, having officers spend two weeks at a time patrolling the community has improved relationships between the RCMP and Oxford House residents, according to Stober. He says residents, such as the kids he occasionally plays stick ball with, are more trusting of him when he interacts with them more consistently.

NO INTERRUPTIONS

Stober’s own kids like having him around

longer, too.

“It takes a couple days for them to get used to me being gone but, then they’re OK with it,” he says. “When I’m back, it’s uninterrupted quality time together.”

Despite being away from family and friends, working at Oxford House has some perks.

While on the reserve, officers live in double-wide trailers that are located in a fenced area of the community across from the detachment. These patrol cabins are fully furnished, have satellite TV, dishes and cleaning supplies. The RCMP also pays for all food and travel.

Cpl. Jennifer McKinnon worked in northern isolated posts for seven years before transferring to Oxford House in April. She uses her time off to help other detachments that are short-staffed.

“I can count on one hand how many times I’ve taken two weeks off while posted to other detachments, but now I get it every month,” says McKinnon. ■



Trust between Oxford House residents and RCMP officers is growing thanks to a change in the detachment’s fly-in model.

Letisha Sherry, RCMP



CULTIVATING COLD-CASE EXPERTISE

HISTORIC INVESTIGATION COURSE HELPS OFFICERS DEVELOP LEADS

By Travis Poland

When a case is cold, investigators must adapt.

About 30 police officers from the RCMP and other agencies hoping to thaw cold cases, recently picked up new skills at the Canadian Police College.

The Unsolved and Historical Death Investigation Course, the first of its kind at the college, covered topics from investigative and forensic anthropology to DNA science and interviewing methods.

“The hot case and the cold case are different beasts,” says RCMP Sgt. Ghislain Ringuette, who works in investigating training at the college, adding the course provides standardized methodology and the latest in cold-case investigative strategies.

FRESH TECHNIQUES

Classes covered strategies such as geographic profiling — using maps and location analysis to focus a search area — and cognitive interviewing — a non-accusatory style focusing on memory recall and historic events. Officers learned how social media and soliciting public tips can help develop leads during an investigation.

One lecture covered recent innovations in DNA science and technology allowing police to take new paths with previously untestable DNA evidence.

Another session shed light on investigative genetic genealogy, which uses crime scene DNA, online databases and genealogy research to develop evidence.

Experts from U.S. agencies who use the technique explained that investigators link DNA to distant relatives and build family trees using public records and newspaper archives, filling gaps to find a suspect name.

The technique led American investigators to Joseph DeAngelo, who was dubbed the Golden State Killer and allegedly committed scores of burglaries, sexual assaults and murders in the 1970s and 1980s.

Since DeAngelo’s 2018 arrest and charges, dozens of historic American homicides and sexual assaults have been solved using the technique. In Canada, the Vancouver Police Department and Canadian Border

Services Agency have used the approach.

Cpl. Mike Burns of the Yukon RCMP Historical Case Unit, says the method opens up a “brand new window for investigations.”

“This could help with unidentified remains cases where there can be DNA but few investigative leads,” says Burns, who’s been with the RCMP for 32 years.

The National Centre for Missing Persons and Unidentified Remains lists nearly 300 cases of unidentified remains dating back to the mid-1960s.

Experts stressed the new technology doesn’t replace traditional door-knocking and interviewing.

“You still need the footwork to get the job done,” Burns says. “These historic cases are marathons, not a sprint.”

While it’s hard to determine how many homicides become cold cases, Statistics Canada reports that on average, 70 per cent are considered solved each year.

HUMAN OUTLOOK

While the course focuses on investigative skills, it doesn’t ignore the more personal aspects.

“A case is more than the paper, more than pictures and more than files,” says Ringuette.

RCMP Cpl. Grace Wood says a presen-

tation from a sexual assault victim and the police officer who solved the case a decade later reaffirms the value of historic case work.

“It’s important we work to serve the victim and their families and bring justice and closure,” says Wood, who works in serious crimes in British Columbia.

Maryanne Pearce, RCMP advisor on reconciliation and murdered and missing Indigenous women and girls, discussed nuances of communicating with victim families and witnesses in a culturally informed manner.

Pearce explained the importance of keeping family up to date on investigations and the benefits of things such as a neutral meeting place when interviewing some witnesses and talking with community elders.

“Officers work in Indigenous communities and while one presentation doesn’t revolutionize the world, we wanted to show some approaches,” says Ringuette, adding it’s important information as Indigenous people can be overrepresented as victims of crime.

Officers say attending the college allows them to meet colleagues from across Canada and build a nation-wide network.

“We can share practices and it’s a lot easier to pick up the phone and call somewhere when you already know someone there,” says Burns. ■

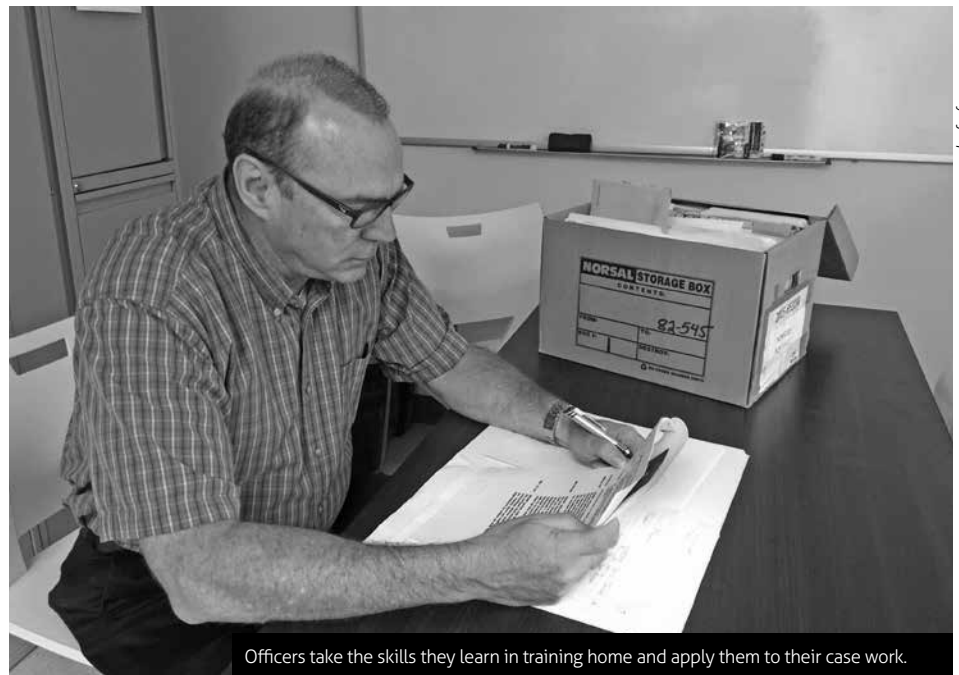


Photo courtesy of Cpl. Mike Burns

Officers take the skills they learn in training home and apply them to their case work.



PROBLEM SOLVING CAN BE A BLAST

TEAMWORK KEY TO BOMB-DISPOSAL WORK

RCMP



As an RCMP explosive disposal expert, Sgt. Chris Willkie says when he goes to a call, he needs to be prepared for anything.

Diffusing an explosive device might be one of the most dangerous jobs in the RCMP. Whether dealing with a single bomb or a stash of old dynamite, members of Explosive Disposal Units (EDU) are called in to make dangerous materials safe. Paul Northcott spoke to Sgt. Chris Willkie, a 17-year veteran of EDU based in Winnipeg, Man., about his work.

WHAT'S YOUR JOB?

We protect people and property from the dangers of unexploded devices. There are seven of us in this unit and we get calls from all over of Manitoba. We don't usually work in Winnipeg because the city police have their own EDU. We've been involved in cases where investigations have led to arrests. I'm also involved with the Chemical, Biological, Radiological, Nuclear and Explosive materials response team, which examines events that could be linked to terrorist activity.

WHAT TRAINING IS NEEDED?

You start with the basic explosive handling

course at the Canadian Police College. That's four weeks. There's also a week of training with an x-ray system that can reveal details of the device you're focused on, before you have to render it safe. The training teaches you to stop a bomb from detonating, so you learn about the electronic components associated with explosive devices. After that, you'll know enough to keep yourself safe. But you learn more when you attend calls, which you never go to alone.

WHAT ARE THE QUALITIES OF A GOOD EXPLOSIVES EXPERT?

Problem solving, acting calm, clear thinking and being able to work with a team. You've only got one chance to get this right and you have to be prepared for anything. You have to step back and really assess what's before you.

WHAT EQUIPMENT DO YOU USE?

We have a five-ton, 24-foot bomb truck that carries everything we need to render a bomb safe. We have the bomb suit, which protects

us in case of a blast. We use robots that can more closely examine the device, x-ray technology that can provide more details about its components and a water cannon. When we decide to disrupt the device with a water cannon, the team uses the water to disrupt the power supply the device needs to detonate.

WHAT'S IT LIKE WEARING A BOMB SUIT?

It's a 90-pound (40-kg) suit of armour that's front loaded with Kevlar and a heavy ceramic protective plate, all designed to protect the vital organs in case of an explosion. Your field of vision is limited and your hands are not as protected because you need to feel or touch objects. Also, I've met people who say they're not claustrophobic, but when you first put that suit on, you can feel alone pretty quickly.

TELL ME ABOUT ONE OF YOUR CALLS AND WHAT YOU LEARNED?

We received a call from Sherridon, Man. (north of Flin Flon) for dynamite in the basement of an abandoned hotel, where we actually found thousands of detonators. So you have to go into situations with an open mind, not knowing what you're really going to face. The detonators were all copper based and unstable. There were about 15,000 of the detonators in the basement, which was very small and partially collapsed. We couldn't even wear our bomb suits. So they were removed in batches by hand. They were later wrapped with an explosive charge and disposed of.

WHAT'S THE BIGGEST CHALLENGE OF THE JOB?

No two devices are the same, so it's the unpredictability of what you may face when you get called. But that's the greatest thing, too. It's very challenging. If you get stressed easily then EDU is probably not for you. When the team is called out, everyone views the situation. Then you have to discuss things and develop a plan that everyone believes in. We need to have a collective vision because it's a job where you can't say, "Well that's it, we can't figure it out. Let's go home." ■



A DEFINING CASE

RCMP TEAMWORK LED TO CATCHING INNISFAIL BOMBER

By Paul Northcott

Financial advisor Brian Malley spent months meticulously building an improvised explosive device. But just days after it detonated and killed a disabled mother of one in Innisfail, Alta., he was already on the RCMP's radar.

"He was definitely a person of interest," says Cpl. Dan Gyonyor, the lead forensic investigator into the blast that killed Victoria Shachtay instantly as she sat in her wheelchair on Nov. 25, 2011.

Some details in the case can now be revealed as Malley's final appeal was dismissed last year.

In 2007, Shachtay gave Malley \$575,000 to manage — a court settlement she received following the car accident that left her paralyzed.

Malley lost most of Shachtay's funds. And then he executed a deadly plan to build a bomb.

The improvised explosive device was detonated as Shachtay opened a box that was disguised as a gift but that Malley had wired to the bomb. The explosion was so powerful, it destroyed the 23-year-old's apartment and sent shrapnel rocketing outside.

SPECIALISTS AT WORK

Afterwards, a multidisciplinary team of RCMP officers and experts had months of

work ahead of them — starting with the bomb-disposal experts and the forensics and DNA specialists who combed the scene for evidence followed by the Major Crime Unit (MCU) investigators who pieced everything together.

"There were so many specialists involved, and all with a different mandate, so we had to make sure everyone was in the loop," says Gyonyor, who was on the case from start to conviction.

To begin, he says Explosive Disposal Unit (EDU) members checked the scene to make sure it was safe.

"There could have been another bomb. But the EDU guys also have to keep in mind the integrity of the scene for the forensics work that follows," says Gyonyor.

For that reason, they wore protective equipment to prevent contamination.

"We wanted to make sure when the time came, defence counsel couldn't challenge us on our work," says Sgt. Greg Baird, an RCMP explosives technician who investigated the bombing.

RCMP chemist Nigel Hearn was on the scene, too.

Hearn, who works with the trace evidence team at the RCMP's National Forensic Laboratory Services in Ottawa, brought an ION scanner to the blast site to detect things the human eye can't see and potentially compromise the scene.

A tent was set up and Hearn examined every person going in and out.

"We stopped one officer because we found trace amounts of explosives on their gear," says Hearn. "It's kind of like if you get motor oil on your hands. You can't just wash it off with soap and water."

REWARDING PAYOFF

All of that work was vital so officers could look for bomb fragments, such as pieces of metal from the casing, the detonator, wiring and the power source.

Hearn actually found explosives that had not ignited. Later in the lab, a colleague used a lead-based isotope technique to identify the solder Malley had used to join electronic parts together.

MCU investigators later discovered the very same solder in a garage Malley had been using — separate from his residence — that had been sub-contracted to him by a business partner.

Sgt. Kanwardeep Dehil, with the Alberta Major Crimes Division, had hundreds of officers on the case throughout the investigation.

"The discovery of all the bomb parts, gunpowder and the sheer destructive power of the explosion was breathtaking," says Dehil.

He says major crimes officers were instrumental in the discovery of fingerprint evidence.

"However we didn't determine that until it was analyzed at the lab at a later time," says Dehil.

Malley was arrested in May 2012 and convicted of first-degree murder in March 2015.

Hearn says the Innisfail case is a model for how operational teams work closely with RCMP forensic scientists. The case is also used as a teaching model at the Canadian Police College to train investigators how to work together as one multidisciplinary team.

"This case served as a defining moment wherein our current team at the laboratory became more intimately connected with operational units," says Hearn.

Baird echoes those comments.

"The work solidified the importance of having the right people involved and providing their expertise to the file." ■



Stephane Massinon/Postmedia News

Hundreds of RCMP officers and specialists worked together to solve the shocking homicide of a young mother, who was killed by an explosive device in 2011.