

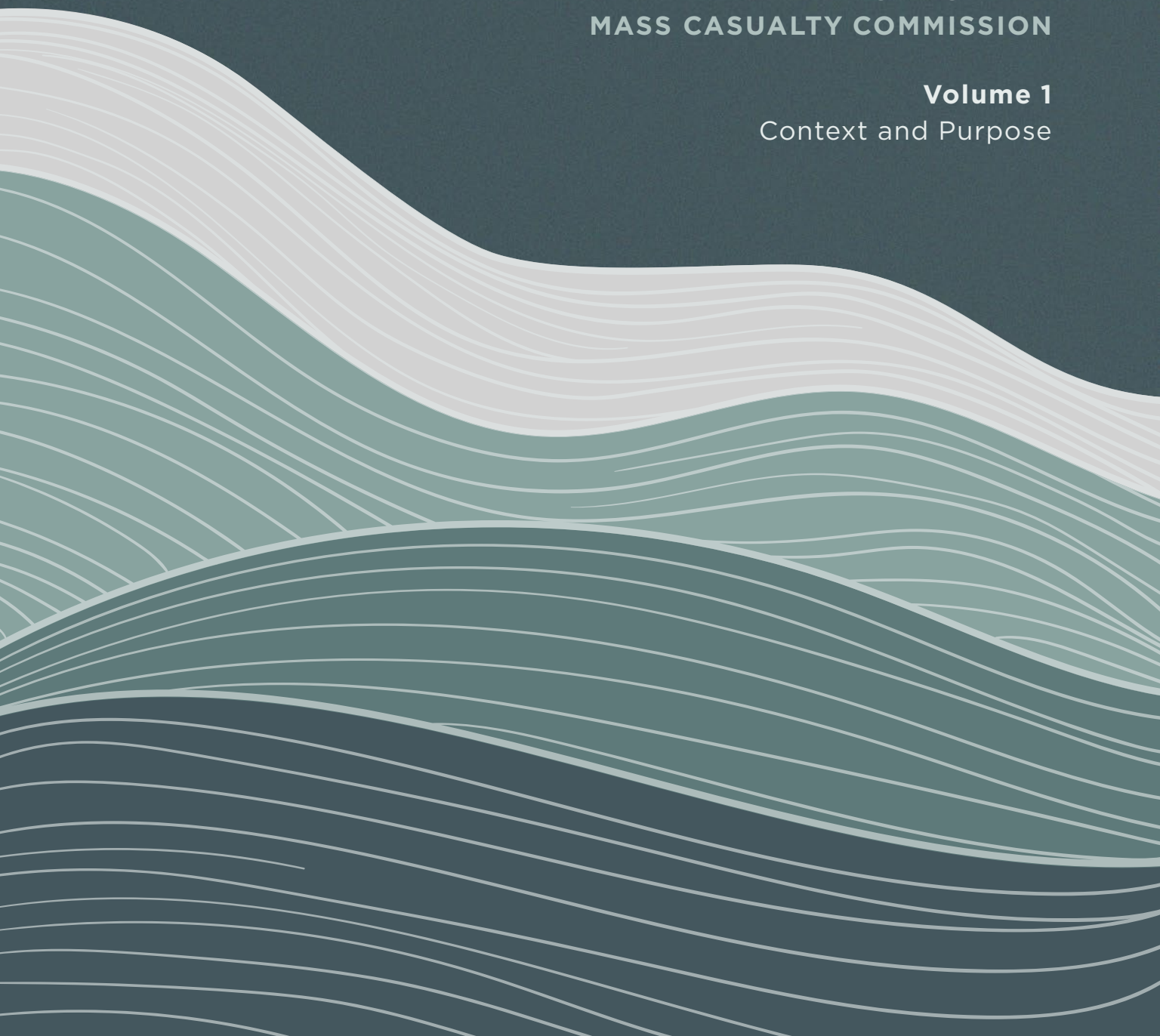
The Joint Federal/Provincial
Commission into the April 2020
Nova Scotia Mass Casualty

**MASS
CASUALTY
COMMISSION**

Turning the Tide Together

**FINAL REPORT OF THE
MASS CASUALTY COMMISSION**

Volume 1
Context and Purpose



March 30, 2023

Her Excellency
The Governor General in Council

His Honour
The Lieutenant Governor of Nova Scotia

Your Excellency and Your Honour:

We are pleased to deliver to you the Final Report of the Joint Federal/Provincial Commission into the April 2020 Nova Scotia Mass Casualty (Mass Casualty Commission) pursuant to the terms of reference for this Inquiry, established by federal and Nova Scotia Orders in Council PC 2020-0822 and 2020-293, and further to Orders in Council PC 2022-0940 and 2022-224.

Given the breadth and importance of the issues identified in our mandate, we have prepared this Report in seven volumes. Recommendations are contained throughout and consolidated in the executive summary. Appendices and three annexes are also included.

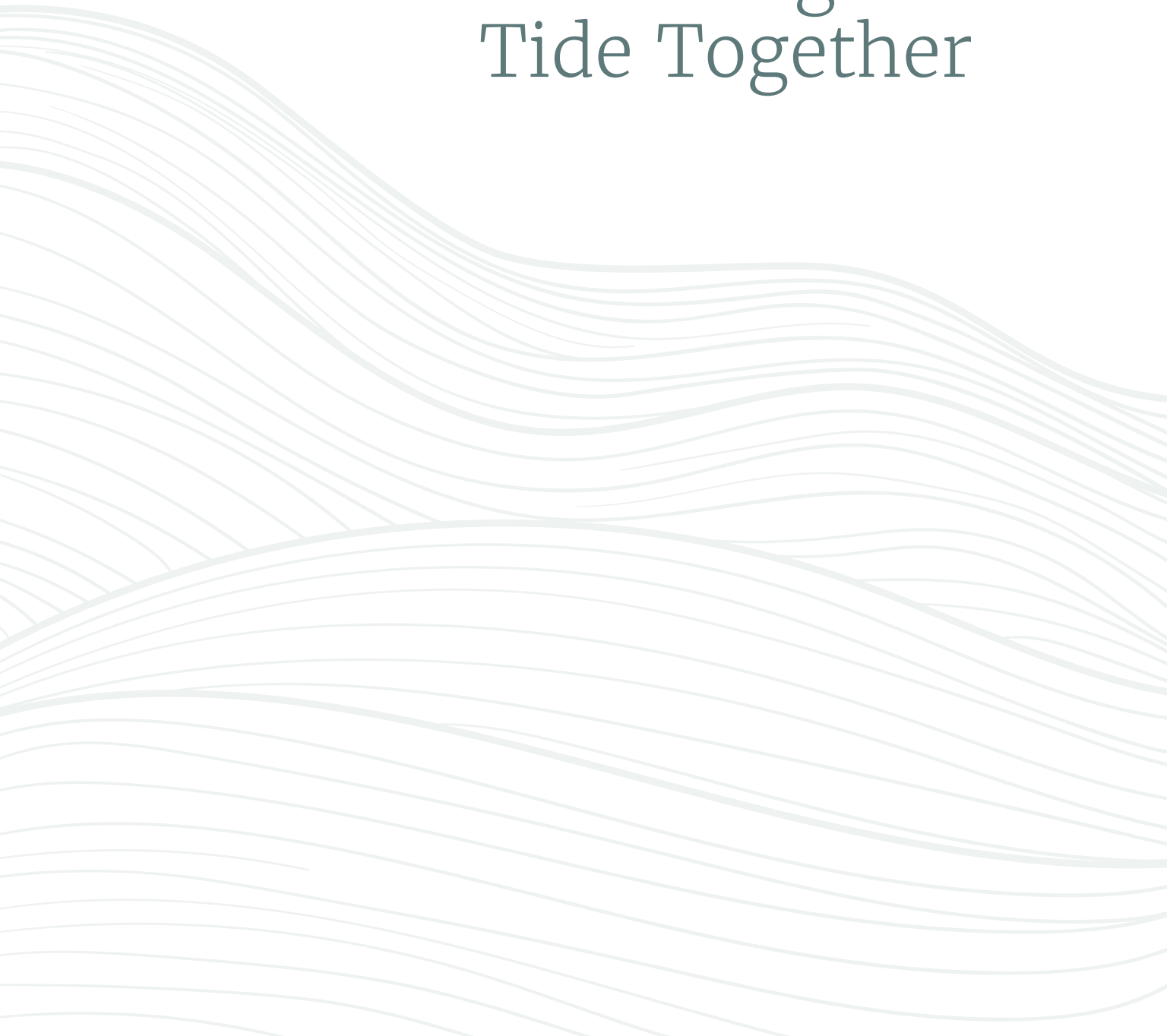
We are honoured to have served the public on this Commission and, while our work as Commissioners has concluded, the work required to take action and implement the recommendations in this Report must begin. It will require leadership and commitment. The time is now to take the necessary actions to make our communities safer for everyone. We owe it to the memories of those whose lives were taken, to all those harmed and affected, and to each other.

Hon. J. Michael MacDonald
Chair

Leanne J. Fitch
(Ret. Police Chief, M.O.M.)

Dr. Kim Stanton

Turning the Tide Together



The Joint Federal/Provincial
Commission into the April 2020
Nova Scotia Mass Casualty

**MASS
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Turning the Tide Together

FINAL REPORT OF THE MASS CASUALTY COMMISSION

March 2023

Volume 1 Context and Purpose

**THE JOINT FEDERAL / PROVINCIAL COMMISSION
INTO THE APRIL 2020 NOVA SCOTIA MASS CASUALTY**

Honourable J. Michael MacDonald
Commissioner, Chair

Leanne J. Fitch (Ret. Police Chief, M.O.M.)
Commissioner

Dr. Kim Stanton
Commissioner

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The Joint Federal / Provincial Commission
into the April 2020 Nova Scotia Mass Casualty

Turning the Tide Together:
Final Report of the Mass Casualty Commission
Volume 1: Context and Purpose

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Le rapport final de la Commission des pertes massives*. Volume 1 : Approche et but visé.

This is one of seven volumes of
Turning the Tide Together: Final Report of the Mass Casualty Commission.

The full report is available in [English](https://MassCasualtyCommission.ca) (<https://MassCasualtyCommission.ca>) and
[French](https://commissiondespertemassives.ca) (<https://commissiondespertemassives.ca>) along with transcripts, exhibits,
webcasts, and reports prepared by or for the Commission.

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Navigating This Report

Mental Health and Wellness

Sometimes reading about distressing or emotionally overwhelming information can be challenging. As you read this Report, please make sure to keep mental health and wellness in mind. If you or someone you know is in need of support, consider the resources listed below or check with your local health authority or the Canadian Mental Health Association at cmha.ca to find resources in your area. A list of services is also available on the Commission website MassCasualtyCommission.ca.

- If you are experiencing distress or overwhelming emotions at any time, you can call the **Nova Scotia Provincial Crisis Line 24/7 at 1-888-429-8167**. You do not have to be in a crisis to call, and nothing is too big or too small a reason to reach out. The Nova Scotia Provincial Crisis Service can also provide the contacts for other crisis services that are available if you live outside Nova Scotia.
- If you or someone you know is struggling in any way, you can call **211** or visit 211.ca. 211 offers help 24 hours a day in more than one hundred languages and will be able to connect you directly to the right services for your needs.
- The **Kids Help Phone** is a national helpline that provides confidential support at 1-800-668-6868 or Text CONNECT to 686868.
- Additional supports for across Canada are available at www.wellnesstogether.ca.

Report Structure

Turning the Tide Together, the Final Report of the Mass Casualty Commission, brings together everything we have learned about the April 2020 mass casualty in Nova Scotia as well as our recommendations to help make communities safer.

The Report is divided into seven volumes. Volumes that are longer are divided into parts and chapters focusing on specific topics, while others just contain chapters. Recommendations, main findings, and lessons learned are woven throughout the Report and are also listed in the Executive Summary. Appendices and annexes are also available. All materials relating to the Final Report are available on the Commission website [MassCasualtyCommission.ca](https://www.masscasualtycommission.ca) and through Library and Archives Canada.

Each volume of the Final Report focuses on an area of our mandate:

Volume 1 Context and Purpose

Volume 2 What Happened

Volume 3 Violence

Volume 4 Community

Volume 5 Policing

Volume 6 Implementation: A Shared Responsibility to Act

Volume 7 Process, and Volume 7 Appendices

Annex A: Sample Documents

Annex B: Reports

Annex C: Exhibit List

We hope this Report not only encourages conversations about community safety but also helps people and organizations to move from conversation to collective action. Together we can help to make our communities safer.

We remember

Tom Bagley

Kristen Beaton, who was expecting a child

Greg and Jamie Blair

Joy and Peter Bond

Lillian Campbell

Corrie Ellison

Gina Goulet

Dawn and Frank Gulenchyn

Alanna Jenkins and Sean McLeod

Lisa McCully

Heather O'Brien

Jolene Oliver, Aaron Tuck, and Emily Tuck

Constable Heidi Stevenson

E. Joanne Thomas and John Zahl

Joey Webber

Part A: Commemoration

PART A Commemoration

The Commission's work was grounded in the memories of those whose lives were taken. We paused to remember them each day during our public proceedings and carried their names with us while we worked.

No one holds those memories more dear than the families and loved ones of the people we commemorate here. Many of these same family members also took part in the Inquiry as Participants. As Commissioners, we are grateful for the courage they showed in speaking with us about their loss, experiences, and suggestions for change. We continue to extend our deep and lasting condolences to them.

We asked all the families if they would like to commemorate their loved ones in their own words. In the pages that follow, we set out the memories and the pictures they chose to share with us.

Tom Bagley

Tom Bagley was a man who wore many hats. Not only was he a devoted husband to wife Patsy Bagley for almost 50 years, he was the best father that anyone could dream of. I was so truly blessed to be able to call him dad. My world feels so much smaller now without him in it. The title that he most loved in later years would most likely be Poppy. It was the way his blue eyes would sparkle the moment you said the names Brody and Braea that made it quite obvious there was a special bond that will forever be cherished.



Tom was born April 21, 1949 in St. John, New Brunswick to parents Edward and Eileen Bagley. He was one of four siblings: Jim Bagley, Mary Bagley Creighton, and Richard Bagley, now deceased. Tom knew from a young age that he wanted to help others. At 15 he enlisted in the reserves and continued until the age of 17 at which time he began his life's adventure with the Royal Canadian Navy RCN/CAF as a leading Seaman, where he served for 10 years on such ships as HMCS Saint Laurent, the HMCS Margaree, and the ship that he was the most passionate about the HMCS Bonaventure. After leaving the Navy, Tom began his career as a crash rescue firefighter at the Halifax International Airport (HIAA) for 31 years. During this time he also volunteered at both the Enfield Volunteer Firehall and Elmsdale Volunteer Firehall for approximately 20 years of service.

In addition to volunteering, Tom was involved in many different organizations. He was a third-degree knight with the Knights of Columbus Saint Bernard's Council 11625 in Enfield. In honour of his passing an annual award entitled the 'leave no neighbour behind' is given to someone in recognition of going above and beyond to assist a neighbour or community member in need. It is my opinion my dad exemplified this on that fateful day. Tom was also a member of the Lions Club for many years, volunteering his time in the community.

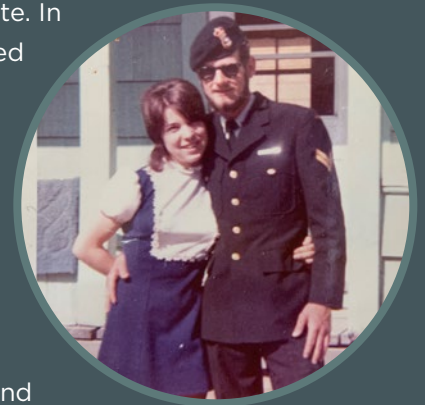


Tom loved just being out in nature. He loved fishing, hunting, skidooing, driving his ATV and going for rides on his Harley. Tom was an avid Harley lover and was a lifetime member of the Harley owners group. Tom sat as Atlantic Director and regional Director for a number of years. Tom was also a member of the Snowmobilers Association of Nova Scotia (SANS).



Tom was the type of person who was never at a loss for words. He definitely could talk. He was an earnest storyteller who could keep people captivated until the very end. He had a wealth of knowledge that now is sadly lost. What I wouldn't give to hear one of his stories one last time.

After his passing while going through some paperwork, I came across a certificate from the Canadian Red Cross blood collection acknowledging that he had donated over 100 times. I recall as a child many times hearing the phone ring, asking if my father was available to donate his O negative blood. It was only in recent years due to health restrictions that he was no longer able to donate. In the wake of this devastation, the Canadian Red Cross launched a campaign to encourage people to donate blood. I knew this was something near and dear to my father's heart and something he would stand behind. I contacted the Red Cross and shared that my dad was a faithful donor and as a result the campaign to donate in my father's name was decided. To those of you who donated and continue to do so, thank you.



My dad was a man who lived to help others, and despite this noble quality that led to his untimely death, I am certain he would have done the same over again as that was the type of man he was. He was my hero and my pride. It is my hope that we all remember Tom Bagley by the way he lived his life and not by the tragedy that ended it.



Contributed by Charlene Bagley on behalf of the family of Tom Bagley

Kristen Beaton, who was expecting a child

Photo contributed by the family of Kristen Beaton



Greg and Jamie Blair

Photos contributed by the family of Greg and Jamie Blair



Joy and Peter Bond

When Harry and Cory Bond remember their parents, they recall seeing their Mom and Dad happily climbing into a big rig together and driving off into the sunset alongside a cloud of black smoke.

“Soft hearted and kind people, they were just good people,” said the younger brother Cory.

Growing up in Back Bay, New Brunswick, Joy worked at the local sardine plant. One day she saw a truck driver waiting by himself to unload a delivery. She offered him dinner while he waited, which led to a marriage spanning more than four decades.

As a stay-at-home mom, Joy was always there when you needed something. She was well known for her pumpkin and lemon meringue pies, banana bread and classic Maritime turkey dinner.

Her daughter-in-law Patty remembered, “You could ask Joy for any recipe or how to substitute an ingredient while cooking.” Joy also enjoyed crocheting blankets and dishcloths for friends and family. Her sons described her as someone who animals and children instantly loved. When she would come to visit Harry and Patty Bond’s house, she would take off her glasses so that Cooper, one of their four beagles, could lick her face until she would snort from laughing so hard. Each year, Joy decorated her home with beautiful and elaborate Christmas villages that continued to grow larger and larger each holiday season.

At 74 years of age, Peter was a retired truck driver, and a legendary one at that. He had his Class 1 license and could drive just about anything on wheels whether that be a school bus, garbage truck, 10 wheeler or 18 wheel tractor trailer. Working independently while on the road, Peter was joyful behind the wheel and often reported that “his 18 wheeler was his therapy”. Both Harry and Cory remembered taking long distance hauls into the United States with their father as far as South Carolina and Georgia. On the road they would drive for long stretches over several weeks without a single disagreement or argument.

As much as he loved to drive, he loved being with his family even more. The family of four would take road trips together to visit Joy’s family in New Brunswick and further into New Hampshire in their brand new Dodge Caravan that Peter had won on an Atlantic Lottery scratch ticket.

After raising their two sons near Chester, Nova Scotia, Joy and Peter moved to their retirement home in Portapique in 2007. Their grandchildren, Tessa, Tiffany, Ricky and Kyle, and great grandchildren, Isabella and Sophie, basked in their love and called them Nanny Joy and Poppy Peter.

After several decades of being apart for long stretches of time, they grew even closer in retirement, able to spend more time in the same place. They did everything together.

“They went everywhere together, pulling big loads for their family. To me that’s old school love,” said Harry. “They deserve to be remembered.”

That’s why he organized a Memorial Drive to honour his parents’ memory and all the loved ones lost in the mass casualty from Chester to Peggy’s Cove, a scenic, peaceful route along the coast of Nova Scotia’s South Shore. Remembering that their Dad insisted that he and Cory say the Lord’s Prayer before going to sleep as kids, the drive was started with that blessing for safe travel.

With more than 250 vehicles – motorcycles, jeeps, trucks and big rigs – taking part during the Covid pandemic, Harry led the procession on his first Harley-Davidson motorcycle carrying his 17 year old niece, Tessa, and an urn that contained his parents’ ashes.

Harry takes inspiration from his favourite quote from Sylvester Stallone playing Rocky Balboa: “You, me, or nobody is gonna hit as hard as life. But it ain’t about how hard ya hit. It’s about how hard you can get hit and keep moving forward.”

Prepared on behalf of the family of Joy and Peter Bond



Lillian Campbell

Photo contributed by the family of Lillian Campbell



Corrie Ellison

When his family and friends speak about him, they remember Corrie Robert Ellison as a thoughtful, kind person who went out of his way to help others. Ashley Fennell, a close friend of Corrie's for almost a decade, described him as a "beautiful soul".

"My brother was a really good guy. He helped people that he could," said Clinton Ellison, Corrie's older brother.

Corrie was born June 5, 1977 and grew up in the Truro area. While attending Princess Margaret Rose Elementary School, Corrie suggested the school mascot be the panda, which it is to this day. As someone who was legally blind, Corrie connected deeply with music. His father remembered that one of Corrie's favourite bands was Metallica.

"He's the type of person who liked fishing and the outdoors," said his father, Richard Ellison. Corrie loved the outdoors and his life touched the hearts of many people. He was witty and intelligent, and had friends far and wide, many of whom were from the Indigenous community of Millbrook.

Corrie also liked archery, shooting sports and NFL football. While his father was a Minnesota Vikings fan and his brother Clinton supported the Baltimore Ravens, Corrie felt a special connection with the New England Patriots because their legendary quarterback Tom Brady was the same age as Corrie.

Corrie and Clinton were visiting their father Richard Ellison in Portapique on April 18, 2020. The three were getting to know each other again after several years of distance and Richard was thankful for the opportunity to reconnect with his sons.

His father Richard remembered, "Corrie was a fine young man who made the best of the circumstances of his life."

Corrie is survived by his father, Richard Ellison, Portapique; brother, Clinton Ellison (Angela), Halifax; son, Connor Reeves. He was predeceased by his mother, Deborah Ann (Kirk) Ellison, who loved him dearly.

Prepared on behalf of the family of Corrie Ellison



Gina Goulet

Gina Yvonne Marie, age 54 of Shubenacadie. On April 19, 2020 Gina was abruptly taken from this world by an act of senseless violence and will be forever missed.

Gina was a vibrant, dynamic woman and a proud mother. Her free spirited independence led her to live a life of fulfilment. Whether she was on the beach in Cuba, on the river bank with her fishing rod, at her cottage with the dogs, spending time with her family, dancing salsa in her living room or enjoying the company of her horse – she always had a smile on her face and gratitude in her heart. She will be remembered for her kindness, generosity and ability to light up a room. Her laughter and zest for life resonated with anyone she met and she has left this world with much more than she ever took from it. Gina was a survivor. She conquered cancer in 2016 and again in January 2020 but never let it define her life. Her experience was only fuel to live with more love and appreciation in her heart. Gina was a dentist for 27 years. Having the ability to literally put smiles on people's faces was one of her greatest and most proud achievements.

Contributed by Amelia Butler on behalf of the family of Gina Goulet



Dawn and Frank Gulenchyn

While living in southern Ontario and planning their retirement, Dawn and Frank Gulenchyn built their dream home in Portapique, Nova Scotia.

The couple lived in the Durham region for more than two decades before moving to Nova Scotia in 2019. Frank had carefully renovated the couple's retirement home in Portapique as Dawn finished up her career of more than 20 years at Hillsdale Terraces long-term care home in Oshawa, Ontario. She is remembered as honest and conscientious and someone who treated the residents as if they were her own family and friends.



"She showed that kindness and respect for them. When she came into the building, her residents were her family. She was like a beam of sunshine," said Spatzie Dublin, Director of Food Services at Hillsdale Terraces.



Their son Ryan Farrington from Trenton, Ontario remembers his parents by wearing a plaid lumber jacket that his stepfather Frank had given him when he showed up for a visit to his parents' Nova Scotian home underdressed for the weather.

"He gave this to me when I came down one year. It's just something, one of the only things I have to remember my stepfather by," said Farrington.

Dawn and Frank Gulenchyn are lovingly remembered by their sons, Ryan and Jonathan and daughter, Traceena. They were "Nana and Papa" to their grandchildren: Riley, Nolan, Alyssa, Callie, Ethan, Isabella, Kaylee-Anne, Keagan, Makinlee, Paisley, Casey and late granddaughter, Heaven-Lee.

The family has set up a public Facebook group as a memorial named "In loving memory of Dawn and Frank Gulenchyn" which includes a video made by Dawn and Frank's grandson Riley Farrington.

Prepared on behalf of the family of Dawn Madsen (Gulenchyn) and Frank Gulenchyn

Alanna Jenkins

“To know her was to love her”.



From the early days of the events of that tragic April weekend in 2020, we have often been reminded of the wonderful, caring and beautiful person our Alanna was to all those that had the honor of knowing her. Through the many stories and memories shared with us from people who had spent time with her, we have even more insight into the amazing woman she had become. Our hearts are full of pride knowing what a difference she made in people’s lives!

When asked whether we wanted to have a commemorative page about Alanna in this final report, our immediate answer was yes. We always want her to be remembered for the amazing daughter, sister, granddaughter, niece, partner, stepmom, nana, friend and coworker she was to all! There are many adjectives to describe a person and when talking about Alanna they are endless! Ones that immediately come to mind include:

- Honest & Outspoken – you always knew where you stood with her whether you liked it or wanted to hear what she had to say. If you asked for her opinion you always knew you would get her most honest answer.
- A Great Listener & Loyal Friend – when you told her something you knew it would go no further... as her grandfather used to say “it was in the vault”. Together her and Sean were great listeners and loyal friends to all their friends and family. She was the voice of reason that goes along with being a good listener.
- Compassionate & Empathetic – comes from her love for those who mattered most to her and go along with her kind and caring ways. Friends and coworkers often talked about Alanna’s energy and positive attitude, her understanding and ability to make things work.

They called her a “difference maker” and they talked about her true teamwork and the tremendous compassion she had for her love of life and family.

Alanna’s involvement with StFX and the Forensic Psychology Program was very near and dear to her heart. She loved helping mentor students and was proud to be part of Forensic Psychology Day at StFX. A former coworker and fellow X Woman said “Alanna always made people feel included and special. She lived her truest self and felt it was okay to just be yourself!”. Although she had a demanding job being a correctional officer and then a correctional manager she was able to balance her work and home life. But most important to Alanna was her love of family and friends.

Our girl was our everything, not only was she our daughter she was our best friend, who we miss every single minute of every single day. She loved her brother, Josh, dearly and could be counted on to support and challenge him only as a sister could.

Her life with Sean at their little piece of heaven on the Hunter Road were her happiest days. They loved their life together whether it was just with themselves or cooking and entertaining family and friends around their table, in the man cave or around a big bonfire... they were the best hosts ever. They loved being out in nature, hunting, fishing, four wheeling, tubing on the river with friends or taking the occasional hike in the woods with their trusty companions Bama and Remi.

Their friend Shelly said “They brought out the absolute best in each other and their kindness and giving personalities made you want to always strive to be the best person you could be!”. Alanna (and Sean’s) other happy place was at her Chance Harbour Paradise as she liked to call it, again spending time with family and the beach friends and enjoying beach walks, bonfires and music nights with her being DJ extraordinaire and knowing every word to every song.

With Sean came the family that Alanna learned to love with all her heart. Taylor and Mia, she loved you as if you were her very own and little Ellie brought a happiness to Alanna that was so, so special! From the time Alanna was a young girl she loved children and never lost her desire to find out what would bring joy to a child.



They had so much more love to give and so many more things to experience and places to travel to. We were so, so lucky that our families together shared so many amazing memories with both Alanna and Sean... they just weren't enough. I will steal Alanna's friend Wendy's words "Although Alanna had many qualities that made her exceptional in every way she will be missed most for her loving and giving spirit, her genuine smile, her witty banter and infectious laugh. The light Alanna shone on to all will not be extinguished with her passing. She will live on through those who love and honor her always".

"There is nothing more beautiful than someone who goes out of their way to make life more beautiful for others." – Mandy Hale

These words describe Alanna and Sean to a T and as Alanna herself would say:

"Take the damn picture!"...

And we are so happy she did ♥

Contributed by Susan Jenkins on behalf of the family of Alanna Jenkins



Sean McLeod

“The things you do for yourself are gone, when you are gone. But the things you do for others, remain as your legacy.”

- Kalu Ndukwe Kalu

Helping people was something that came naturally to Sean, always the first to lend a hand to someone in need. Offering an ear to listen and support to anyone and everyone needing it, purely out of the goodness of his heart. You never really know how much someone impacts the lives of others, until you hear the stories shared after they have passed away.

To say there was an outpouring amount of grateful stories of Sean, would be a total understatement. He and Alanna both were constantly doing whatever they could to make life a little easier for everyone around them.

On the days he wasn't at work, you could find him outside hunting in his back forty, getting dirty while lobster fishing or just relaxing in the river behind their home. He loved his time in the kitchen cooking and baking everything and anything. Football, of course Tom Brady all the way. You know he made sure to razz all of his buddies about their teams not being as good as his trusty Pats.

You see Sean was one of those people that brought laughter and light into any room he walked into. And it didn't matter where he was, he usually knew at least one person in every room. He could put a smile on anyone's face and it was hard not to just by looking at his cheeky grin and hearing his goofy laugh. Both his best traits that were fortunately passed down to the center of his world, his granddaughter Ellie.

Trying to think what Sean would want to be remembered most for is a hard one because he would say “why would anyone want to remember me anyway?”. But each and every person he encountered could tell you something worth remembering about him. The world became dimmer the day we lost Sean, and as cliché as it is to say, the world truly was a better place with him and Alanna in it.





He should still be here to watch his daughters and granddaughters grow up and live their lives. To continue to live his life to the fullest, just like he and Alanna always did. He looked forward to retirement and many more vacations spent relaxing in the sunshine. All things he was robbed of the day we lost him to a senseless and preventable act.

To say Sean is missed, doesn't even begin to describe the loss that all of his loved ones feel. The hole that was left the day he left us is something that will never be whole again, especially without gaining the closure deserved.

We miss you and the joy you and Alanna brought to us and everyone around you Dad, until we meet again someday.

Contributed by Taylor Andrews on behalf of the family of Sean McLeod

Who was Sean Andrew McLeod? This is a question I have been asked and one that is not as simple to answer as you would think. There was so much to him... Sean was a Son, Brother, Father, Godfather, Uncle, Friend and most importantly Grandfather. He was kind, generous, funny, thoughtful, respectful and a jokester, but also could be serious at times. Many people knew Sean but not all of them had the opportunity to know the entire person Sean was. Sean enjoyed being around friends and family having fun, but also loved the quiet solitude his beautiful property in Wentworth provided after a rough day at work. Sean enjoyed hunting, fishing and being out in the wilderness. He also loved being in his kitchen cooking, baking and making preserves. He baked the best fruitcake, keeping up a loved family tradition with our Nan Kavalak's recipe. He loved the Christmas season, when his home was decorated for the holidays it could turn any Grinch into an elf. His yearly Christmas countdown has been missed by many.

Family was very important to Sean, this included his immediate family and also his close friends. He was always available to give a hand to anyone who needed him, whether it be to offer advice or just be an ear to listen. He was someone you could count on and that you wanted to spend time with. At work he was a Leader, a mentor and a confidant to many. He was never afraid to get into the mix and get the job done. He was always fair and treated everyone with equal respect. He was also known to have some fun and stir the pot just a little (a lot). His coworkers were a very important part of his family and a huge support system for him. His mischievous grin is still often part of many conversations. He is very much missed at work.

Sean had the opportunity to spend some much needed quality time with our Mother prior to his passing during her frequent trips to Halifax for medical appointments and also with our Father while accompanying him to his medical appointments in town. With demands of everyday life, sometimes visits to the house were cut short and were not as frequent as they had once been so this was time which they all appreciated very much.

As his Brother, I miss him more than I can express. We all do. The time that we would have had to spend together as a family was robbed from us and that is unforgivable. We do however look back and appreciate all of the time that we did have together and as time passes we relish in the memories we do have. Yes, tears are still shed, but we are now able to tell stories and laugh, look at pictures and smile. He was loved and forever will be.

Was he perfect? None of us are, and that's part of what made him special...

Contributed by Scott McLeod

Lisa McCully

She lived life fully and loved whole heartedly

She was not perfect and embraced her imperfections

She accepted you for who you were and cheered you on wherever you were going.

She was both strength and vulnerability

She was both “go get ‘em” and chaos

She was a Sunday school teacher and the friend with the glass of wine

She was a lifelong Berwick United Church Camper and friend to so many

She was the friend who sat with you on the bench and cried with you, dusted you off, and cheered you on

She was the voice on the other end of the phone telling you to keep going, and if you can't, feel free to come over

She was the friend who had depth, spiritually, questions, and curiosity

She was open minded and strived to understand others' perspectives

She was authentic and hopeful

She was brave and adventurous

She was silly and spontaneous

She was “throw it in the car, let's get going, and we'll figure it out when we get there”

She was a friend who was there on the good and bad days

She had more faith than fear

Most of all Lisa was a phenomenal Mom!

Her children were the loves of her life and in her every thought

She would move mountains for them and to leave them would have felt unimaginable.

*Contributed by Emily Kierstead, Gail MacFarlane,
and Ruth Janes on behalf of the family of Lisa McCully*



Heather O'Brien

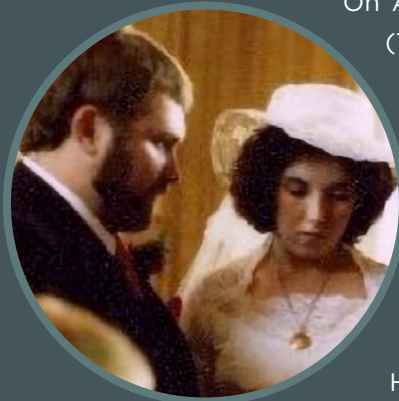
On January 5, 1965 a baby girl was born to Harold and Enid Murray of Masstown, Nova Scotia. She was their first child. Heather Elizabeth. Soon to be followed by two little brothers and a little sister. Heather was kind, intelligent and witty. She was a great role model for her siblings and a daughter her parents could really be proud of. You could often find Heather in the barn. She loved her horses dearly. Her love for guitar also started at a young age. Learning to play by ear as a teenager, she could pick up a song almost instantly. In her adult life, one her favourite pastimes was playing the guitar around the bonfire at any family gathering or barbecue.



Heather grew up on a small hobby farm in the 70s and 80s before she left the small rural town for education in 1983. Nursing was second nature to Heather. From the moment she put the first uniform on it was like she knew exactly where she was supposed to be, helping people, and she had a knack for it. She started her nursing career in Truro in the mid 1980s. She possessed a warmth and patience that could never be taught in school.



On August 17, 1984, Heather married Andrew (Teddy) O'Brien. The love of her life. If you asked her about her marriage, she would tell you that there were trying times, but her heart always remained with one man. They had a once in a lifetime kind of bond. They were best friends even in the rough times and raised a beautiful family throughout their lives together. They eventually moved back to the same property where Heather grew up, and raised their growing family.



Heather became a mother at the age of 21. Andrew Jr. was her pride and joy and soon after his birth she and Teddy decided that a large family was something they both really wanted. This prompted her to take time off from her nursing career to be a homemaker. She went on to give birth to four daughters. Kathleen, Darcy, Molly and Michaella. Her home was happy and full. A beautiful chaos would be the best way to describe life in the O'Brien

house. She had a soft spot for youth and her home became a safe space for many young people over the years. Everyone had a home at Heather's. With a blustering full house, Heather went on to mother three more children. Logan, Kelly, and Neil brought so much joy to her life. She often spoke of how blessed she was to have the family that she did and taught her children to stand up for what was right and protect their own. One can only assume this is why the family stays incredibly close to this day. Heather returned to nursing in 2003 when she went to work with the Victorian Order of Nurses (VON). She would spend the remainder of her career with the VON. Her love for community through her career was evident. She often spent time with clients in the community she grew up in and this was very special for them and for her. She was a familiar face; most of her clients had watched her grow up and now she would care for them through their retirement years. She considered the nurses she worked with like a second family and often celebrated their successes.



Heather stayed active in her community. She loved to play crib on Monday nights at the local Legion and spend time with her 12 grandchildren on the weekends. Every one of them had a special place in Grammie's heart and she was her best self when they were around. She wore the title of Grandmother very well, like nothing else mattered.



Heather O'Brien lived a life that was full, she had what many people strive for in this life and her family finds peace in the fact that she was so happily content when her life was tragically taken on April 19, 2020. Heather's legacy will live in on through her children and grandchildren. They would like the world to remember her for the life she lived and not for the way she died. Though her death has been very public, it is not what defined her. She is defined by her caring and kind spirit, the way she always rooted for the underdog and how beautifully she swept through this life. Though her life was cut short, she certainly lived her life to the fullest and believed in the good that is left in this world.



Contributed by Darcy Dobson on behalf of the family of Heather O'Brien

Jolene Oliver, Emily Tuck, and Aaron Tuck

JOLENE OLIVER

Jolene Lori Oliver was born into a family full of love on November 25, 1980, in Calgary, Alberta. She was the youngest of John and Bonnie Oliver's three daughters, the adored baby of the family and "beyond spoiled" according to her family. She was a very tiny baby – she wore doll clothes for the first six months of her life – and quickly earned the nickname Teenie Weenie Little Joleney.



Jolene was the cutest child. She had natural curly hair, a happy-go-lucky attitude, a constant smile and a remarkable little giggle. As she got older, that giggle turned into an infectious laugh – when she laughed, everyone laughed.

Jolene spent most weekends camping with her family as she grew up. She was passionate about nature from a young age – except for the kind of nature that includes spiders – and particularly loved birds, butterflies, dragonflies, pansies and roses. She would become an avid bird watcher later in life.

Jolene loved writing poetry. And her favourite time of the year was always Christmas. She was born 30 days before Christmas and made sure you knew that Christmas was right around the corner every year on her birthday.

In her elementary school years, Jolene was often sick and spent quite a bit of time in the hospital. It was through this that she realized how many people really cared about her and how much others often did for her. As a result, from a very young age she learned to find joy in doing things for others.

As is often the case in families with three siblings, Jolene was frequently teased by her two older siblings, Crystal and Tammy. They would intentionally push her food together because she hated for it to touch and would happily chase her around the house with a rubber egg pretending that they were about to crack it on her (they only would use a real egg occasionally). Sometimes they would make her very "special" drinks from questionable ingredients found around the house, which Jolene would eagerly drink to have the chance to impress her sisters.

Despite the teasing, Crystal, the eldest of the three girls, quickly became the keeper of her two younger sisters and was always very protective of them. And Tammy and Jolene would play together all the time.



Family was everything to the Olivers, who lived their day-to-day lives as a tight-knit family, spending quality time together. Jolene never missed a birthday or holiday and always bought or sent small gifts for people to let them know she was thinking of them.

Crystal shared this about her family:

“No matter what ever happened in life, where we were or what was going on, we were raised that we always had home. There was always a place for us. And it was always safe. We always protected each other and were always there for each other.”

Jolene was loved dearly by her family and was the “light of all of their lives”. She always had a smile on her face, regardless of life’s challenges. She had the ability to find the positive in all situations and in everyone. She was a very loving person who got personal satisfaction out of helping others and making others smile. She often organized gatherings and made the extra effort to stay connected with family and friends across Canada.

Jolene served as a career waitress and loved connecting with people in her community. She was that kind of waitress that people felt was part of the family at meals. She was kind and positive and always there for people.

Her sister Tammy added this about Jolene:

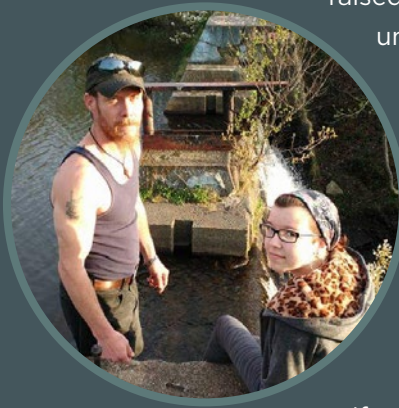
“Jolene was very kind to a lot of people. She was a great listener. She would spend the time with people, listen to their stories and try to help them out. She would lend an ear and take that time that people needed, and I think that really echoed in Nova Scotia.”

Soon after Jolene graduated in 1999, she met the love of her life while working at a bar in her early 20s. It was 2000.



AARON TUCK

Aaron Todd Tuck was born on August 16, 1974, in Halifax, Nova Scotia. He was raised by Bruce Tuck and Gloria Rodgers (née Mae), who loved him until their deaths in 2016 and February 2020, respectively.



Aaron had a very special bond with his mother. Gloria would often say that Aaron was the love of her life and her whole world. Aaron, in return, cherished his mother.

As a young man, Aaron was thoughtful and caring. He didn't have much growing up, and as a result of witnessing the kindness people afforded him and his family, he became a person who helped people all the time.

If someone was stuck on the side of the road, he would spend hours outside in the rain with them trying to help them out. While Aaron could be a little rough around the edges, once you got to truly know him, you would quickly see that he had a big heart and was very soft inside. He was caring, loving and very helpful; he would do what he could for anyone.

Aaron's mother remarried to Angus Rodgers. Angus ignited a love of mechanics in Aaron, which would become not only his future career but also one of his greatest passions. Angus was a father-figure to Aaron. "He gave him some real life-lessons and was a big part of his life. Aaron learned more than just mechanics from Angus – he learned to be a man. And how to treat people," said Aaron's mother-in-law Bonnie.

Aaron had a lifelong love for restoring older cars and became an accomplished mechanic. His mechanical mind also allowed him to learn things quickly; he would catch on instantly once shown how to do something.

He was known to spend time making gifts for people, including beautiful leather-work later in life. "The gifts didn't cost anything, just a whole bunch of time and love," said Bonnie.

Always up for an adventure, when Aaron was in his late teens he traveled across Canada with his best friend Jason, who was like a brother to him. They moved all the way to British Columbia together, but ultimately ended up in Alberta.

And it was a few years later in Alberta that Aaron would meet the love of his life in a bar. It was 2000.

JOLENE AND AARON

Jolene and Aaron met in 2000 in Calgary, Alberta. Jolene was a waitress and Aaron was one of her regular customers. They dated for several months before Jolene brought Aaron home to meet her close-knit family because she wanted to be sure that he was the one. “And then that story was written,” remembers Jolene’s sister Crystal.



Jolene and Aaron loved each other even though they came from very different backgrounds. While Aaron presented a hard exterior, Jolene saw all the good inside him, and through her love, he became a softer person. Aaron was raised an only child while Jolene was the youngest of three in a family that spent much of their time together.

It took Aaron a while to get used to the family dynamic. He didn’t understand the closeness of Jolene’s family at the start. “But at the end of the day, we all grew on Aaron, and Aaron grew on us,” said Jolene’s sister Tammy. “And sometimes we agreed to disagree, but we always loved each other,” laughed Jolene’s mother Bonnie.

As the years went by, Aaron came to really enjoy having a big family and appreciated all the unconditional love that was offered – even if it came with a fair amount of teasing. Aaron and Jolene shared so much in life, and it turned out that one of the things they shared was their fear of spiders. Because of Aaron’s tough exterior, it hadn’t occurred to anyone in the family that Aaron was afraid of much of anything until one summer night when he launched across the yard screaming and freaking out because a spider had descended from a tree above him. A situation that of course had the whole family rolling on the ground laughing at him. On another occasion, Aaron ran into the house hollering because bats were flying around. “It was funny to see that different side of him. It’s not a side of him that he let others see very often,” said Jolene’s sister Tammy.



Aaron worked for a time at his father-in-law John’s glass business, where he excelled due to his ability to learn quickly and apply his mechanical mind. Aaron and John developed a good relationship and Aaron would call John on a regular basis looking for help on repairs around the house or other fatherly advice. When it came to relationship advice though, Aaron’s mother-in-law was always the first person he’d call as she knew Jolene so well.

When Jolene was pregnant with Emily and weeks away from giving birth, Crystal remembers being shocked by Jolene's size. She fondly remembers calling her "Rolly Polly Molie Jolie" because of the stark contrast from her tininess growing up. It became a joke between the sisters, and throughout the years during their phone calls Crystal would ask if Jolene was "teenie weenie" or "rolly polly".

Jolene and Aaron's love gave them the power to transcend their differences and it was a love that was strong and constant and fun. And it was a love that led to their "greatest accomplishment" together: a beautiful baby girl named Emily.

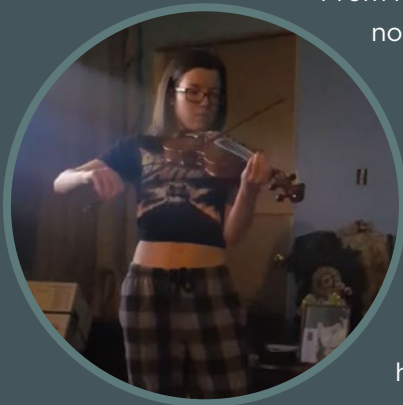
EMILY TUCK

Emily Mae Tuck was born on October 13, 2002, in Calgary, Alberta. She was the only child of Aaron Tuck and Jolene Oliver and the youngest of all the grandchildren and cousins.

She was a wonderful blend of both her parents.

From her father, Emily was brave, headstrong, and stubborn. She was not afraid to tell you what she liked and didn't like "whether you wanted to hear it or not" laughed her aunt Tammy and Emily "had her own direction right from a very young age," said her other aunt Crystal. Emily had no fear and was always open to try something new.

And from her mother, Emily developed a kind heart and was incredibly selfless. She had a desire to make a difference in people's lives and was very mindful of how others felt. Emily had this likeability that allowed her to make friends easily wherever she went. Emily treasured giving to other people and was loved by all who knew her.



Emily loved her family. And she loved being part of a big family. She was very close with her five cousins and spent a lot of special time with them growing up. The three girls – Sydney, Sara and Emily – were the youngest and very close in age, and always spent all their holidays and summers together. As Emily was an only child, she adored this time together, even though it came with its fair dose of teasing being the youngest. The cousins had frequent sleepovers, playing spies and climbing trees. They would spend hours waiting for a mouse to appear at the door of the mouse house built into a tree stump by their grandma.

Sara shared this favourite memory of her cousin:

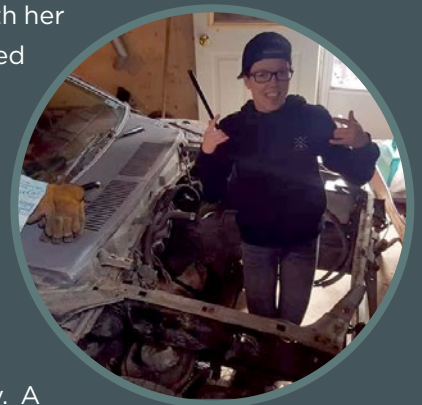
“We would go around in grandma’s garden and help ourselves to little snacks now and then. One time we went around and took one bite out of every single pepper in the garden and left them all hanging on the vines. Grandma was left to deal with all these half-eaten peppers, thinking some vermin got into them, but it was really just us.”

When she was young, Emily was an early riser, often waking up happy and ready to start the day at 5 or 6 a.m. This didn’t always work out so well for other family members as she had a very loud voice and never really learned to whisper. Her aunt Crystal would try to get her to use sign language early in the mornings so she didn’t wake up the whole house with little success. “When Emily was in the house, there could be all the grandchildren together, but you could always hear Emily’s voice over everyone else’s,” fondly remembered her grandma Bonnie.



Even after Emily moved to Nova Scotia she still corresponded frequently with family and would come back to visit. “When somebody moves away, there’s this distance and sometimes people grow apart. That never happened with her – Emily valued her relationship with each member of the family,” recalled Bonnie.

Growing up, Emily spent a great deal of time in the garage with her father where she learned about mechanics and often helped him with his projects. As a young teenager she was able to do her own oil changes and change spark plugs. One time when Aaron was helping Emily’s grandpa replace a motor, Emily was right there helping her dad. “I have a photo of Emily sitting in the motor bay cleaning wheel wells. She used to help her dad in the garage all the time,” proudly recalled her grandpa John Oliver.



Emily’s kind heart extended beyond her friends and family. A school teacher from Sydney shared how much of an impact Emily had made on his life. At the end of Emily’s final school year in Sydney, her teacher announced that he would be teaching a younger grade the following year. Emily approached him after class and offered to help him by providing her old materials that she had kept from that grade. She brought them in for him, and to this day he

teaches with them in her memory and always tells his students that the materials were handed down to him by a wonderful young girl that is no longer with us.

Emily had a passion for playing the fiddle. Her father Aaron bought her first fiddle when she was only about four or five years old. Being from Nova Scotia, Aaron would often listen to Celtic music with Emily's grandma Bonnie who was born in Nova Scotia. "If you're from Nova Scotia, you can leave at an early age, but it will never leave you," said Bonnie. The music bonded Aaron and Bonnie, and as there is a lot of fiddling in the Celtic music from Nova Scotia, Aaron always said "as soon as Emily is old enough, I'm going to get her a fiddle" – which is exactly what he did. Emily took to that fiddle immediately and had natural talent. Her older cousin Ricky shared her love for music and they found every opportunity to play music together. Playing the fiddle became her passion. It was after her grandma's encouragement that Emily's father recorded her playing for an online kitchen-party group in late March 2020.

Emily was just a couple of months shy of high school graduation when her life was taken, and she was deciding whether she wanted to pursue a career in music or apprentice as a welder. She was a bright light to her family and to those who had the pleasure of crossing paths with her.

Emily's grandmother Bonnie Oliver had this to say about her granddaughter:

"Jolene and Aaron's greatest accomplishment was their daughter Emily. She was just a very special little girl. I think now she was born to be an angel."

DEEPLY LOVING FAMILY

Aaron, Jolene and Emily meant the world to one another. They were a deeply loving family that did everything together. They shared in each other's challenges, successes and happiness. Their lives were rich in love, kindness, adventure and family. And they were always smiling.

"They didn't need to spend money to make memories. They made the best of every situation and worked with what they had and made a great life," said Jolene's sister Tammy. Jolene's other sister Crystal added: "They made things, they created things. When they gave you gifts, the gifts came with so much love. They all had so much love."

Aaron lived his life devoted to his wife and daughter and doted upon them. Jolene's mother Bonnie knew that Jolene and Emily "were the lights of his life – he loved those two girls more than anything." He attended all of Emily's fiddle lessons,

encouraging her always, and loved to hear his daughter play. He had a souped-up Pinto that he planned to give to Emily on her 18th birthday. “He kept rebuilding it because it wasn’t perfect. He needed it to be perfect, he needed it to be the best,” said Jolene’s sister Crystal.

Aaron, Jolene and Emily spent their early years in Calgary, Alberta and their later years in Nova Scotia. They moved to Sydney, Nova Scotia in 2014 when Aaron’s mother became ill, and then to Portapique in 2018 when they inherited the family home. Due to COVID-19 isolation protocols, Aaron, Jolene and Emily spent their final weeks together as a family, simply enjoying each other’s company and having fun.

AN ENTIRE FAMILY LOST

“A whole branch of our family tree just got cut off and is no longer there. There’s nothing left. It’s not like they left any children. They didn’t leave anything on this earth. It’s all gone. Other than the pieces and tangible things that are left from their memories.”
– Jolene’s sister Tammy

“It left a big hole in our hearts – we must live every day without all three of them. Why did all three of them leave us at the same time? But they were such a close-knit family. They lived their life together. They made their life together. They had their challenges together. They loved each other. They left this world together. They went to heaven and became angels together. And that gives me comfort, that they are all still together. That’s the only way I can rationalize them leaving such a big hole in all our lives – is that they are all still together. Even though we miss our three angels every minute of every day. And we will forever.”
– Jolene’s mother Bonnie

*Prepared on behalf of the family
of Jolene Oliver, Aaron Tuck, and
Emily Tuck*



The day I met Aaron I became whole. I always knew, intuitively, that I had a brother. I don't know how I knew, I just did.

I found out I was right when I was 12 years old, and I found Aaron when I was 16 and he was 19. I woke up on October 16, 1993, went to the library, looked him up in the phone book and called him. My call woke him up. Once I had confirmed that I had the right Aaron Tuck I asked if he knew who I was and he said, "It's my fucking sister!"

I can still hear his voice and those words in my head. I always will.

Life changed for both of us that day. Neither of us had any real support growing up and neither of us had any siblings. We clung to each other immediately and anyone who knew us knew we had an unbreakable bond.

Over the 27 years we loved each other, we both moved around the country but stayed very close. There was never more than a few days that went by that we did not talk on the phone.

When Emily was born, I got a package in the mail with photos of this beautiful baby with big chubby cheeks and Aaron was so proud. As Emily grew, she and I became close. When she learned to play the fiddle, Aaron would call me and she would play for me over the phone. When I had my daughter, she and Emily were each other's favourite cousin and they spent hours together playing and building forts whenever we visited. I have some wonderful homemade birthday cards that she made for me, and I cherish them so much.

Jolene was a strong, kind woman who loved Aaron with all her heart and was like a sister to me. She gave great advice and I spoke to her on the phone as much as I talked to Aaron.

Aaron was a no-nonsense kind of guy who, if you didn't know him, could seem like a jerk because of his directness and gruff voice. But to those who knew him, he was a fierce friend who was reliable and loving. When he hugged me, he wrapped his whole body around me, and I felt safer than I ever felt in my entire life. He was my big brother and in my mind he was indestructible.

My daughter and I lost an entire branch of our family tree that day and we will never be the same. If the tables were turned and my family was murdered, he would never stop fighting for answers and neither will I. I love you Aaron.

Contributed by Tara Long

Cst. Heidi Stevenson

Photo contributed by the family of Cst. Heidi Stevenson



E. Joanne Thomas and John Zahl

Elizabeth Joanne Thomas and John Joseph Zahl moved to Portapique, Nova Scotia in January, 2017 after purchasing their dream home on the Bay of Fundy. Joanne retired early from a career in health services. John was a United States Navy Veteran. He served his country as a Russian Linguist. John retired from Federal Express.

John and Joanne were married for 34 years and truly loved each other. They celebrated every success in life together and worked through all life's challenges together. The strength of their love for each other was evident to all those lucky enough to know them.

John and Joanne loved animals and considered them part of the family. They were generous with animal rescue efforts and programs. They adopted many four legged family members over the years. John and Joanne were sharing their home with Freddie and Zed, the family cats, on April 18, 2020.

John and Joanne believed all individuals were important. They did not ask for help but were willing to help others to a fault. There are so many examples of this, a few are: John worked with troubled youth in Albuquerque Public Schools following his retirement. They both were active in multiple projects for the homeless in Albuquerque and Nova Scotia. They became involved in their community in Nova Scotia upon their arrival. They looked for ways to improve the lives of others. John and Joanne were instrumental in revitalizing the laundry project at their church in Truro, Nova Scotia. They made the project more than a place for the homeless to do their laundry. John and Joanne ensured those using the service had home baked treats, good conversation and that they knew others cared about them. Joanne served as a Board Member for T.R.E.Y. (Trauma Recovery for Exploited Youth).

John and Joanne loved to travel and were always making new friends on their trips whether the trip was down the road to the store or across the world on a cruise. John and Joanne did their best to ensure their family and friends knew they were loved.

John and Joanne are loved beyond words. They are missed beyond measure - EVERY DAY.

Contributed by Jennifer Zahl Bruland on behalf of the family of E. Joanne Thomas and John Zahl



Joseph Webber

Joseph “Joe” Webber was a country boy through and through. He had a kind heart and was a good, hardworking person who never hesitated to lend a hand. Tragically, he died helping others when he pulled over on the highway on April 19, 2020.



Joe was born on October 1, 1983 in Wyse’s Corner, Nova Scotia. He grew up with his parents and younger sister Laura. Joe and Laura often played together outside their family home – Joe always with a big smile on his face. The siblings remained very close throughout Joe’s life, speaking daily.

Joe gave so much to all those around him. He was well-known in his community as someone who was always there for anyone in need and never expected anything in return. Neighbours remember him as a happy-go-lucky person that they never saw angry or upset.

Joe was a true woodsman, like his dad. He genuinely liked working in the woods and couldn’t imagine living in town. His father ran a forestry business and often used horses for logging in the woods around their community. Joe started working with horses at a young age. He became a gifted horseman with an innate ability to work with draft horses. Bow hunting was another pursuit he enjoyed, and he was continually honing his skills. In his younger days, Joe loved racing at Scotia Speedworld. He had worked his way up from Thunder and Lightning Class to Hobby Class while always carrying the #75 on his car. He enjoyed the competition and the comradery.

Though he had these other passions in life, nothing was more important to him than his family. He was a doting father and he loved his family immensely. He would do anything for his girls.

Although Joe didn’t live to be there for the special event, he left behind one last gift to his family – a beautiful baby daughter born on Christmas day of 2020. Baby “Jo” – his fourth daughter.

Joe will be sadly missed by his four daughters, Jolynn, Emily, Rory and Shirley; partner, Shanda MacLeod; father, Thomas; sister and closest friend, Laura; niece, Allie; nephew, Rylee; numerous aunts, uncles and cousins as well as a wide circle of friends.

He was predeceased by his mother, Shirley Webber; paternal grandparents, Gordon and Laura Webber; maternal grandparents, Eric and Joyce Boutilier.

Prepared on behalf of the family of Joseph Webber

Part B:
The Ripple Effect of the
Mass Casualty

Introduction

INTRODUCTION

The mass casualty of April 18 and 19, 2020, created profound grief, disruption, and destabilization in Nova Scotia and beyond. Early in our mandate, the Commission adopted the image and metaphor of rippling water to signify the breadth and depth of the impact of what happened over approximately a 13-hour period on those two days and in their aftermath. The ripple acknowledges that the immediate impact experienced by those most affected – the individuals, families, first responders, service providers, and local communities – was appropriately the starting point of our mandate. It also captures the dynamic impact of the mass casualty, which expanded outward and affected communities, institutions, and society in Nova Scotia, across Canada, in the United States, and further afield.

We introduced the ripple image as we started our work, and we acknowledge that the rippling effects of the mass casualty will continue after our Report is read and our recommendations are implemented. No one can undo the perpetrator's actions or the actions taken by others in response: these actions are the epicentre of concentric circles of impact caused by one man. Collectively, individuals, communities, the province of Nova Scotia, and all of Canada can learn from this incident and work together toward enhanced safety and well-being in the future. An appreciation of the depth and breadth of this rippling impact is an essential component of effective, concerted, forward-looking efforts. Just as this impact has focused our work, so too it frames our Final Report.

The Commission learned about the impact of the mass casualty in several ways, including through meeting with family members, witness interviews, individual testimony with supporting documents at public proceedings, two opening panel discussions, small group sessions with directly and indirectly affected individuals, roundtables of people with relevant expertise, and a consultative conference with Indigenous people. In addition, the Commission undertook a number of activities to provide opportunities for us to learn more from community members about this impact, including through community conversations, consultations with

stakeholders, and the Share Your Experience survey (described below). We provide an overview of what we learned about the impact of the mass casualty in this volume, but it is a central thread woven into the whole Report.

More than a thousand people generously provided their insights into the impact of the mass casualty. This information has created a stronger awareness of the dimensions of the rippling effect: it has expanded our understanding of the range of people who fit into the category of those most affected; and it has enriched our insight into the nature and size of the indirect effects of the circling waves. It has reinforced the perception that, once initiated, a ripple has an immediate effect and that it will not be diminished easily, with its vibrations immeasurably reaching shores in all directions.

Overview of Parts A and B

This volume begins with a commemoration of those whose lives were taken during the April 2020 mass casualty. We asked all the families if they would like to commemorate their loved ones in their own words. In Part A of this volume, we set out the memories and the pictures they chose to share with us.

Part B provides an introductory overview of what the Commission has learned about the impact of the mass casualty. It follows the ripple metaphor movement outward from the violent centre of lives taken to introduce the individuals and families most affected (Chapter 1) and onward to the communities most affected (Chapter 2). Chapter 3 sets out a preliminary account of the impact of the mass casualty. We present what we learned from three Commission activities: the opening panel discussion on the human impact; the consultative conference with Indigenous people; and the Share Your Experience survey. This summary reflects input from those directly and indirectly affected by the mass casualty.

More detailed information about the effects of the mass casualty is contained throughout the Report in specific aspects of the mass casualty response. For example, we consider the ramifications of how public communications, next of kin notifications, and support services provided to family member survivors and other community members were carried out. One focal point of Volume 4, *Community*, is the nature of the repercussions experienced by emergency responders.

CHAPTER 1

**The Individuals and
Families Most Affected**

CHAPTER 1 The Individuals and Families Most Affected

The perpetrator's actions were at the epicentre of the April 2020 mass casualty. The impact radiates out from this nexus to those most affected, beginning with the individuals with whom he came into contact: the people whose lives he took, the people he injured, and others present who witnessed what happened or otherwise interacted with him. The reach of the perpetrator's actions rapidly spread and rippled out to families of the deceased and injured survivors.

Among those most affected, some applied for, and were automatically granted, what is referred to in the Orders in Council as "the opportunity for appropriate participation" at the Commission:

FAMILIES:

Family of Tom Bagley

Family of Kristen Beaton

Family of Greg and Jamie Blair

Family of Joy and Peter Bond

Family of Lillian Campbell

Family of Corrie Ellison

Family of Gina Goulet

Family of Frank Gulenchyn and Dawn Madsen (Gulenchyn)

Family of Alanna Jenkins and Sean McLeod

Family of Lisa McCully

Family of Heather O'Brien

Family of Aaron Tuck, Jolene Oliver, and Emily Tuck

Family of E. Joanne Thomas and John Zahl

Family of Joseph (Joey) Webber

INDIVIDUALS:

Bev Beaton

Tara Long

Andrew MacDonald and Kate MacDonald

Lisa Banfield

Mallory Colpitts

Darrell Currie

Clinton Ellison

Richard Ellison

Adam Fisher and Carole Fisher

Leon Joudrey

Scott McLeod

Greg Muise

Bernie Murphy, later represented by Darrin Murphy

Deb (Debra) Thibeault

We recognize that the list of individuals and families most affected by the mass casualty extends beyond this list of Participants. For example, among those most affected are Cst. Chad Morrison and the family of Cst. Heidi Stevenson. However, they opted not to be Participants in the Inquiry process, which is entirely their right. Others shared their experience with us through one or more Commission processes; still others chose not to engage.

It is difficult to make a meaningful, broad statement about the impact of the mass casualty on those most directly affected. Suffice it to say that the effects are profound and long-lasting. Darcy Dobson, the daughter of Heather O'Brien, expressed

it this way: “I’m going to start with saying there will forever be a before and after April 18th and 19th.”¹ In addition, it is important to keep in mind that no two individuals will experience grief and traumatic loss in the same way. In her interview with the Commission, Mallory Colpitts, a Portapique resident at the time of the mass casualty, reflected:

This gets more into the ripple effect. I have gotten in great discussions ... of realistically, if it’s in my best interests to ever return there ... There are some situations where that’s practical, there are some where it’s just simply not ... So, the ripple effect is, you know, it didn’t just take my residence from me, it took my ability to enjoy future experiences, which is still something I obviously have to grieve.²

Another group of individuals directly affected by the mass casualty are emergency responders and other service providers who were personally involved in the incident in some capacity, either on April 18 and 19 or in the immediate aftermath. This group includes police, firefighters, emergency health service professionals, 911 call operators, and others who we may not immediately think of, such as funeral home directors, remediation and cleaning services, food delivery services, tow-truck drivers, and others who were providing front-line service. We have estimated that approximately five hundred to six hundred people responded to the mass casualty in their work capacity; many more responded in their capacity as family and community members.

CHAPTER 2

The Communities Most Affected

CHAPTER 2 The Communities Most Affected

Land Acknowledgement*

Pukwelk Skijinukik Ne'po'pni'k nike' Panwijkata'sik.

Wula kmitkinuk tan mena'q iknumwetuk na weskowita'jik wula Panawijqa'tasite'wk.

Anquna'tasik na kmitkinuk wula'tan kisaknutmaqank teluisikel wantoqotik aq witaptultimkewey tan Wapana'kikuwaq mimajuinuk ewi'kmi'tip wla tan game'kewaq aklasie'wk pekistu'tip 1693ek.

Mu eteknukul tamiaw kisaknutmaqanetuk kisna ankuo'mkeweletuk kisna tplutaqanetuk kluswaqn iknmuetasik kmitkinuk. Nasik mikwaptasikip Wapana'kikuwaq wisunkewey aq kisa'tu'tipn tplutaqank wjit tan tel wela'matultimkewel.

Mej majukwaqtasilkel kiskuk aq nekey wjit wet telwa'tik msit wen na kisaknutamaqank na anquna'luksi'kil.

Nikey, Panwijqa'tasite'wk nenmi'tij tan kis tlitpi'aq ajkneiwaqn wjit mimajuinu'k weskowita'sijik We'kopekitk kmtne'ktuk, Wasoqsikeka'katik, Matuwese'ka'katik, Nisaqaniska'katik, We'kwampekitka'katik, Sikipne'katika'katik, Ene'tekopukwuek, aq Niktuipukwek!

Wula nekey wutank kpme'kl! Ta'hoe!

* This land acknowledgement was prepared at the Commission's request by Tuma Young, KC, member of the Eskasoni and Malagawatch First Nations, co-founder of the Wabanaki Two Spirit Alliance, and assistant professor of Mi'kmaq Studies at Cape Breton University, and was prepared in consultation with Elders. The communities of Glenholme and Debert are in the same general hunting area, so both are referred to as Wasoqsikek (area of bright light). Hunter Road and Wentworth are also in the same general hunting area and are referred to as We'kopkeitik Kmtme'tuk (Cobequid Mountain area).

The Mass Casualty Commission is located on Mi'kma'ki, the unceded territory of the Mi'kmaq People.

This territory is covered by the "Peace and Friendship Treaties" which the Mi'kmaq and the Wabanaki tribes first signed with the British Crown in 1693.

The treaties do not deal with the surrender of lands and resources but in fact recognized Mi'kmaq and Wabanaki tribe's titles and established the rules for what was to be an ongoing relationship between the nations.

These treaties are still recognized and followed to this date by all parties. That is why we say we are all Treaty People.

The Mass Casualty Commission would also like to acknowledge the harm and trauma that has been inflicted on the people in the communities of Hunter Road, Wentworth, Glenholme, Portapique, Debert, Onslow, Truro, Millbrook, Shubenacadie, and Enfield.

This land in which these communities are located is now considered sacred by all.

Ta'hoel

Introduction

In this chapter, we provide a brief introduction to the communities in Colchester, Cumberland, and Hants counties, in the heart of Nova Scotia, through which the perpetrator travelled on April 18 and 19, 2020. We start with the places where he killed or injured people: Portapique, Debert, Wentworth, and Shubenacadie. We include other small communities directly affected by his actions: Great Village, Glenholme, and Onslow. All these communities are located in the ancestral and unceded territory of the Mi'kmaq, and these places overlap and are connected to three Mi'kmaw communities that were also affected by his actions: Millbrook First Nation, Sipekne'katik First Nation, and Glooscap First Nation.

Volume 2 provides a narrative account of what happened leading up to, during, and in the aftermath of the mass casualty and includes maps of the communities most affected. One of this section's objectives is to provide context to readers so that these communities are more than simply names on a map.

We recognize the impact on each individual community and also the relationships among them. Their rural nature is key to understanding their connectedness. As Carole Fisher, one of the individuals most affected by the mass casualty, said during a small group session, "Our community to us is from Five Islands to Debert, Glenholme ... and that is how people work in rural areas. You care for one another."¹ She explained, "It is a different perspective, you know. When you live in the city most people don't know their neighbours. They don't know them. They don't have a relationship with people down the street or a street across from them and that is not the way in rural Nova Scotia."²

People create these relationships across county lines. During our public engagement activities, many community members remarked on the unique nature of Nova Scotia rural communities. One respondent to our Share Your Suggestions survey (through which we invited members of the public to submit their recommendations for change related to our mandate) wrote:

Familiarity is what makes a community. Yes, a community is also built by its tight geographic nexus, by its identity, by its sticking together in hard times, by its celebration of its heroes. But, most of all a community is Familiar with itself. People may have conflict with each other and they may not always like each other in a community but they are Familiar with each other. Familiarity is the prize of experience; a bounty of information

stored by collecting one's daily experience. Community is the heart and the whole of Nova Scotia. As a product of its history and geography, Nova Scotian communities are particularly intertwined. It is a province built of a network of communities. It is only one of these communities that most of the world will hear about in relation to the tragedy but there were many communities that this tragedy touches. The cost of this tragedy on communities across Nova Scotia has not yet been estimated or understood.

Several community residents emphasized the strong sense of connection among these communities after the mass casualty. In the spring of 2020, one symbol of this connection was that almost everyone had red hearts on their property, mailbox, house, and lawn. One community member recalled:

When you drove through the affected communities (and even ones that weren't directly involved) it would be hard to not drive and see a red heart. These were handmade hearts, all of different shapes and sizes and I remember this because it was so significant, and it symbolizes that everyone was in this together – not just from the mass casualty but adding covid on top of it all ... Every house was different but all shared the same message.

The rural character of central Nova Scotia that incorporates these caring communities continues to be seen as a strength and source of resilience. At the same time, the April 2020 mass casualty had a destabilizing impact on many people's sense of place because it challenged their view of rural communities as inherently safe, especially in contrast to urban spaces. The perpetrator lived and worked in Dartmouth, but he owned property and spent a significant amount of time in Portapique. Many people described this fact to be chilling because it reinforces the inescapable conclusion that mass violence can happen here – and therefore anywhere and everywhere. In Volume 4, *Community*, we examine the impact of rurality on the response to the April 2020 mass casualty and provide more information about these communities.

The Communities Most Affected

Portapique

Portapique is a small community situated in rural Colchester County, Nova Scotia. Like many places in Nova Scotia, it is shaped by water. It sits on the east bank of the Portapique River and the north shoreline of Cobequid Bay. As an extension of the Bay of Fundy, Cobequid Bay experiences the highest tides in the world. This feature creates a striking coastline where expansive mudflats completely submerge, only to re-emerge again at low tide.

Portapique was the home of Jamie and Greg Blair; Joy and Peter Bond; Dawn and Frank Gulenchyn; Lisa McCully; Jolene Oliver, Aaron Tuck, and Emily Tuck; and E. Joanne Thomas and John Zahl. It is also the home of Richard Ellison, whose sons Corrie and Clinton Ellison were visiting.

This small community is located about 40 kilometres from Truro – the largest population centre in the area – close enough to amenities but far enough away to benefit from country living.

To the west of Portapique, separated by the Portapique River, is the neighbouring community of Five Houses. To the east, by approximately 10 kilometres, is the community of Great Village. They too are small communities. Great Village is where the RCMP established its critical incident command post beginning shortly after midnight on April 19, 2020.

Portapique is situated along Highway 2, with several roads branching from the highway. Some of these roads, including Portapique Beach Road, extend toward the picturesque shore of Cobequid Bay.

On April 18, 2020, the residential area accessed through Portapique Beach Road consisted of approximately 30 seasonal and permanent residences. Several unpaved roads extending off Portapique Beach Road are privately maintained. Neither the public nor the private roads have sidewalks, and at that time there were no streetlights. In this area, homes sit on generous-size lots, and many are set back from the road. Some are visible from the road, while others are tucked away behind trees and thick vegetation. A network of ATV / four-wheeler trails leads to stunning views of the Bay of Fundy.

Since 2021, the Rotary Club of Truro along with other local and provincial partners has spearheaded the Community Build Up Project. It includes a recently opened playground in Portapique, and a significant renovation to the Portapique Community Hall, which broke ground in 2022.

Debert

The community of Debert is located in Colchester County. In approximate terms, it is situated 24 kilometres northeast of Portapique, 16 kilometres northeast of Great Village, and 20 kilometres northwest of Truro. As you approach this community, you pass large blueberry fields.

Debert is an industrial area. The main thoroughfare of the Debert Business Park is Ventura Drive, running northeast / southwest from the intersection of Plains Road for approximately 1.4 kilometres before ending at a decommissioned airbase, now used for recreational aircraft. This site welcomes large crowds when it hosts Air Show Atlantic in the summer months. The business park contains a number of significant installations, such as the Debert Hospitality Centre, which hosts conferences and weddings, and the Debert Diefenbunker, a fallout shelter built in the 1960s which is open for tours and events.

Debert is also home to the Mi'kmawey Debert Cultural Centre (a centre of culture and learning) and Interpretive Trail, and to MacElmons Pond Provincial Park, popular for picnicking and for a one-kilometre hike alongside the lake. Heart's Haven Memorial Park is also being developed near Plains Road in memory of Kristen Beaton and Heather O'Brien, both employees of the Victorian Order of Nurses, whose lives were taken during the mass casualty.

Wentworth

The Wentworth region is located in Cumberland County. This county borders the Northumberland Strait to the north, Colchester County to the east, the Minas Basin to the south, and New Brunswick to the west. Alanna Jenkins, Sean McLeod, Lillian Campbell, and Tom Bagley all lived in Cumberland County.

Highway 4 runs through the Wentworth region in roughly the shape of the number 7. Highway 4 intersects with Hunter Road north of Wentworth, and with Plains Road in Glenholme. The Wentworth Market, the Wentworth Recreation Centre, the local firehall, and the Wentworth Learning Centre are all located on Highway 4 southeast of Hunter Road. The road access from Highway 4 to Wentworth Provincial Park is approximately 250 metres south of the Highway 4 / Highway 246 junction.

Many Nova Scotians have come to know and love the Wentworth Valley as a year-round outdoor destination. When the snow flies, skiers and snowboarders descend on the largest ski hill in the province. Many cottage communities have developed in the area so residents can enjoy winter sports and summer amenities including nearby lakes and the Northumberland Strait beaches. The rolling hills and valleys also make it the perfect spot to view the fall colours and, in the spring, to hike to the Wentworth waterfalls.

Shubenacadie

Shubenacadie is located in Hants County, approximately 35 kilometres southwest of Truro, and approximately 23 kilometres northeast of Enfield, where Cst. Heidi Stevenson worked. It sits in an important agricultural area and is home to a large provincial wildlife park. Gina Goulet and Joey Webber both lived south of the village.

The village of Shubenacadie is situated on the southwest bank of the Shubenacadie River. Highway 2 runs through the village in an approximately northeast / southwest direction. The south end of the Shubenacadie cloverleaf interchange connects Highway 2 and the western prong of Highway 224, which travels southwest toward Milford and exit 9 of Highway 102.

The Shubenacadie River has long been an important waterway for the Mi'kmaq. Sipekne'katik First Nation, one of 13 M'ikmaq communities in Nova Scotia, is to the south of the village.

Great Village

Great Village is a picturesque community of approximately 500 people located along Highway 2 and the north shore of Cobequid Bay in Colchester County. It also includes the areas of Highland Village to the west and Scrabble Hill to the north-northwest. Known for its antique shops and plant nursery, this area is home to large-scale beef and strawberry farms that welcome seasonal migrant workers. One of its landmark churches was recently transformed into a diner.

Glenholme

Glenholme is a community located approximately 24 kilometres northwest of Truro. It is roughly halfway between Truro and Portapique. Portions of Highway 104, Highway 4, Highway 2, and Plains Road run through Glenholme. Many locals have memories of camping at the Hidden Hilltop campground. This small community garnered provincial attention at the height of COVID-19. At a time when most services were closed, the “Truckers’ Angel” offered free meals and support to long-haul truckers. Many rallied around this initiative, donating food and volunteering time to assist.

Onslow

Lower Onslow is a farming community located in Colchester County about 10 kilometres west of Truro. Its nearby corn maze and “fear farm” attract adventurous visitors every fall. In keeping with its agricultural roots, Onslow has a large and active 4H Club, which provides programs for youth.

The Onslow Belmont Fire Brigade hall is located at 12355 Highway 2. It is approximately 7.9 kilometres from the homicide scenes in Debert. Used as a comfort centre on April 19, it was also the site of the Onslow firehall shooting.

While Highway 2 is a secondary road, locals often take this stretch – “the old way” – between Truro and Masstown, home to a very busy market and event space. When the treeline opens up along Highway 2 in the fall, travellers can see scenic views of Cobequid Bay.

Mi'kmaw Communities

Mi'kmaq people have been living in the Atlantic region to the Gaspé Peninsula in Quebec since the time before living memory, over 14,000 years ago. The Mi'kmaq lived over the entire territory and the settlements were established in response to colonial policy. Today, there are 13 distinct Mi'kmaw communities in Nova Scotia, all of which are unique places of generations of culture strength and communalism. These communities have shown incredible tenacity to navigate centuries of colonialism, oppression, and discrimination while maintaining the vitality of generosity and an ethos of caring. Mi'kmaw communities are experiencing a revival of their spirituality through tradition and culture that reflects the unique identities of Indigenous peoples.

The 13 communities share Mi'kmaw oral traditions, including different versions of the Kluscap (Glooscap), a cultural hero and symbol of the sacredness of territory and the interconnection of communities. Kluscap is

a hero and caretaker of Mi'kmaq people who was said to have been created by the Great Spirit. Stories tell of Kluscap as the one responsible for creating the unique geography of Nova Scotia that we see today such the Annapolis valley and the Five Islands in the Bay of Fundy.³

A Kluscap monument towers over the Millbrook Cultural and Heritage Centre, which is a centre of culture and learning.

Millbrook First Nation

The Millbrook First Nation is a Mi'kmaw community located within the town of Truro, positioned in the hub of Nova Scotia. Millbrook First Nation also has reserve land in Beaver Dam, Sheet Harbour, and Cole Harbour. The First Nation has 2,123 members, with approximately 971 living on reserve and 1,188 off reserve.⁴

Millbrook First Nation's economy is thriving thanks in part to the development of the Millbrook Power Centre and development on the Cole Harbour land. Millbrook is also the home of the Confederacy of Mainland Mi'kmaq and the Kwilmu'kw Mawklusuaqn (Mi'kmaq Rights Initiative).

Corrie Ellison lived in the Millbrook community.

Sipekne'katik First Nation

Sipekne'katik First Nation is the second largest Mi'kmaq First Nation in Nova Scotia. It is located in Hants County, near Shubenacadie and includes the communities of Indian Brook (IR #14), New Ross, Pennal, Dodd's Lot, Wallace Hills, and Grand Lake. The land area of Sipekne'katik First Nation spans 12.13 square kilometres. It is remote by comparison to Millbrook First Nation.

The Sipekne'katik First Nation website includes this description of the nation's origins:

Sipekne'katik was officially founded in 1820 as a parcel of land established as a reserve and was given the name "Indian Brook." Mi'kmaq oral history reports that this area may have been used for centuries prior as a sacred site to prepare for ceremonies and to prepare for hunting and fishing trips.

The history of Sipekne'katik also traces back to a darker time in Canada's colonial history. In 1699, Father Rale, among other settlers, colonizers, missionaries began to force the entire Mi'kmaq population on the peninsular NS into one settlement near Sipekne'katik /Shubenacadie, NS. The land of Sipekne'katik was primarily used as a site for mission work between the years 1700-1820. The Canadian Government's centralization plan gained momentum in the 1900's with the continued forced relocation of Mi'kmaq people to one area in mainland Nova Scotia around Sipekne'katik/Shubenacadie. This resulted in a large number of Mi'kmaq people relocating to live in the community of Sipekne'katik, and in fact there is still a large community of people in Sipekne'katik today.

Shubenacadie Residential School was located near Sipekne'katik First Nation and was in operation from Feb. 5, 1930, until June 26, 1966, during which time approximately 1000 Mi'kmaq children attended the school (Cape Breton University, 2016). Survivors still reside in our community today, some of whom have contributed their stories to the Mi'kmawey Debert Cultural Centre IRS (Indian Residential School) Legacy Project. The IRS Legacy Project is a project of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission that began in 2013, dedicated to sharing Shubenacadie Indian Residential School survivor's stories. Sipekne'katik First Nation is proud to be part of this ongoing project that honours the lives of survivors and their families through the sharing of their stories.⁵

Sipekne'katik First Nation is a growing community of 2,588 band members, with approximately 1,244 members residing in the community and 1,344 members residing out of the community. Sipekne'katik changed the name of the community from the given settler name 'Indian Brook' to the traditional name Sipekne'katik in late 2013, which means "where the wild potatoes grow."⁶ It is one of two centres of healing from residential schools in Canada. It is home to the signatories of the Peace and Friendship Treaties and has a lead role in upholding treaty diplomacy.

Sipekne'katik First Nation had a special relationship with Cst. Heidi Stevenson.

Glooscap First Nation

Glooscap First Nation is a Mi'kmaw community located in both Kings County and Hants County. Also known as Kluskap, its reserve is located approximately 6.4 kilometres (4.0 mi) from the Town of Hantsport. The reserve encompasses 171.1 hectares (423 acres) of rolling, mainly forested land. Forest management is practised by the First Nation. Glooscap is the third smallest Mi'kmaw community in Nova Scotia. The 2022 population was 415 people, of whom approximately 100 lived on the reserve. It too is a relatively remote community.

Glooscap was formed in the early 1800s in conjunction with the Micmac Missionary Society. The reserve was created in 1907 from land owned by Silas Tertius Rand, a missionary of the Micmac Missionary Society. Although Silus Rand failed in his conversion efforts, he did create an archive of the Mi'kmaq oral tradition. Originally known as Horton 35, Glooscap First Nation officially changed its name in 2001.

Glooscap First Nation has a strong kinship tie system and is the leader of the Mi'kmaq consultation program for tripartite (federal / provincial / Indigenous) relations.

The Glooscap First Nation was recognized for its economic development on a national scale when it was named as the 2017 CANDO Indigenous Community Economic Developer of the Year. This award is presented annually to Canada's highest achieving Indigenous community in economic development.

Chief Sidney Peters lives in Glenholme, and the members of the Glooscap First Nation were concerned for his safety during the mass casualty.

CHAPTER 3

The Impact of the Mass Casualty

CHAPTER 3 The Impact of the Mass Casualty

The April 2020 mass casualty caused a rupture of immeasurable magnitude and proportion. In this chapter, we deepen our examination of its impact on the most affected individuals, families, and communities and broaden our scope to encompass additional rings of impact. We present what we learned from three Commission activities: the opening panel presentation on the human impact of the mass casualty; the consultative conference with Indigenous people; and the Share Your Experience survey.

In Chapter 2, we introduced the theme of rural interconnectedness. As a study of the rippling impact of the mass casualty shows, this theme is both a strength and a challenge. In our consultations, we heard the common refrain that it is challenging for many people in this province to move forward and heal when everyone seems to know someone who knows someone who was directly affected. The connections can be layered and complex, and sometimes difficult to untangle. Many people reported that additional aspects of their association to the April 2020 mass casualty and its aftermath revealed themselves over an extended period.

Moving outward from the communities most affected, the ripple encircles the province of Nova Scotia. This impact is summed up in this representative response to the Share Your Experience survey: “The grief, fear, and sadness have been felt provincewide by Nova Scotians of all ages.”

The circle of impact widens further to encompass what we have learned from people in many other parts of Canada who expressed a concern for those most affected and also recognized the extensive impact on themselves and those around them. For example, we heard this comment:

I think that it's important for the Commission to know that these events affected Canadians in a very traumatic way across the country, not just locally. Communities all across the country are invested in what comes of

this Commission, because we want to feel safe again. We want to know if things can be changed for the better so that it is less likely that something like this will happen again.

The effects of the mass casualty also extend beyond Nova Scotia's borders through the impact on family members of loved ones whose lives were taken on April 18, 2020. We think in particular of the Farrington family in Ontario, the Oliver / Tuck family in Alberta, and the Zahl / Thomas family in the United States.

Panel on Human Impact

The opening session of the Commission's public proceedings in February 2022 recognized the personal and community impact of the mass casualty. It included a panel discussion on this human impact - its broad reach and its effects on wellness. We invited community leaders in the field of mental health to share their experiences and independent perspectives about these aspects of the aftermath of the mass casualty.

Panel on Human Impact: Its Broad Reach and Its Effects on Wellness

- Starr Cunningham (facilitator), CEO, Mental Health Foundation of Nova Scotia
- Robin Cann, registered social worker (private practice), Cumberland County
- Dr. Keith Dobson, Department of Psychology, University of Calgary
- Katherine (Kathy) Hay, president and CEO, Kids Help Phone
- Susan Henderson, executive director, Canadian Mental Health Association - Colchester East Hants
- Crystal John, coordinator of social work, Adsum for Women and Children
- Cheryl Myers, chair, Along the Shore Community Health Board

In her opening remarks, Starr Cunningham recognized the direct impact and the significant ripple effects of the mass casualty on the health and wellness on many

people. She said: “One of the things that I’ve heard from people is they’ll say, ‘Don’t worry about me. I wasn’t directly involved; I wasn’t directly impacted. I’m okay. You know, put your attention and provide the care to those who were most directly impacted.’” The conversation as a whole explored the importance of acknowledging not only those most affected but also the more widespread effects.

Cheryl Myers spoke about the impact of the mass casualty in the context of one of Nova Scotia’s key characteristics: “[M]any Maritimers move on from our small communities,” she said. “We have folks from our community living all over the world.” She expressed this view:

The feelings of loss, anger, frustration, the feelings of loss, the grieving process, mourning, has all affected – is affecting everyone throughout the country. Nova Scotia most of all. Our Nova Scotians, our families, our friends that live in the rural areas, have suffered significantly, their sense of trust, well-being, sense of loss, frustration again.

Ms. Myers also shared her perspective as chair of the Along the Shore Community Health Board, serving a population of approximately 8,200 people extending from Onslow past Portapique to Five Islands. She pointed out that the support systems of many community members had been altered. Some were asking fundamental questions about their safety: “Who do you trust now? How do you move on after this? When the phone rings, when something goes on in the night, what do you do?” She also drew attention to the impact on children of all ages who were experiencing difficulty sleeping, eating, and, more generally, coping. These communities are also home to many family members of those whose lives were taken during the mass casualty, but other family members live far away, further complicating support efforts. She expressed the view that the mass casualty “happened everywhere.”

Along the Shore had taken steps to assist where it could, including by organizing online grief counselling. Helping others was a common community response:

We support one another in rural communities. That’s what we’ve done throughout the years, whether it’s making – having an understanding with a neighbour that you will watch for their light to go on or off in the morning to know that they’re safe in their home, whether it’s picking up a casserole and taking it to the folks in need, whether it’s calling asking if

you want something, if you need something, or just visiting. These are the strengths of our communities throughout Canada in small communities.

As one indicator of the intensity of the impact of the mass casualty, Kathy Hay said that the Canada-wide Kids Help Phone doubled its regular level of interactions with Nova Scotians within hours after the mass casualty, and that this trend continued for some time. She explained: “One-third of all conversations coming from Nova Scotia – and we are in every province, territory – one-third of all conversations were talking about grief for months after the mass casualty.” At the time of this panel discussion, nearly two years after this incident, grief and loss continued to be a main topic of conversation among calls to this help line in Nova Scotia.

From her perspective as a clinical social worker with a rural practice in Cumberland County, Robin Cann emphasized the unique impact of the mass casualty on Nova Scotians who live in rural communities. In her words:

[P]eople’s sense of safety within their communities has been really deeply shaken. We know that rural communities often have this tight knit sense of, you know, depending on neighbours and a high degree of personal safety, at least in a sense, and you know, this sense of being safe among your neighbours. And since the mass casualty, this really has been shifted and what people are describing is an increase in, like, a vigilance or unease in their community.

While acknowledging the broad, rippling impact of the mass casualty, Ms. Cann said that the sense of rural community had been shaken in a particularly fundamental way because of the extended idea of neighbours and neighbourhood:

Yeah, when you think of the proximity effect, right, how folks feel so connected and tied into, you know, each other, and the lives are so intertwined that when something shakes a sense of safety that is shared, there is not just a wound that is a one event, but it’s a relational wound. Right? There’s like a relational piece to this that goes beyond just the events of a couple of days.

As a lifelong resident of Colchester County, Susan Henderson shared her professional and personal experience that the impact of the mass casualty was changing over time. In her work with the Canadian Mental Health Association, she had found that after an initial flurry of activity, people retreated to their homes to find

that sense of safety. She characterized this reaction as “Locked the doors, gathered your loved ones around really, you know, as close as you could,” and then said, “Now what? What do we do?” More recently, she had found that people were trying to move on without forgetting. Speaking personally, she said: “I just sort of wait for another ball to drop. I know it sounds horrible and kind of negative, but you know, you worry about ‘Well, if this could happen, what else could happen?’ because it was just so unbelievable and horrific. And yet if this happened in that little community very close to me, what else can happen? So it really did erode a sense of safety emotionally and physically for all of us I believe.” Ms. Henderson reiterated the deep and ongoing impact of the mass casualty:

We were just so shocked and horrified, as everyone was, I mean, this shook us to our very core, and in some ways continues to; it’s still unbelievable. And again, I want to say this in all - in deep respect for everyone who has lost a loved one, but it was a collective grief, and our need to bring a sense of comfort to our community.

Crystal John drew attention to community members who are often overlooked in conversations about the effects of the mass casualty. From her perspective as social worker and advocate for community development, Ms. John first focused on the impact on homeless persons. In this region of Nova Scotia, many homeless people live in encampments in wooded areas - according to the homeless count in 2021, about one-third of almost five hundred homeless people lived in these environments. Whereas previously they may have felt safe in the woods, now their sense of security has shifted, increasing their sense of vulnerability. At the same time, most of them have no options for accessible housing. She stressed that the perceived lack of safety was magnified by the fact that access to information about the mass casualty incident was delayed:

[T]he hardest part is they wouldn’t know when it began, they wouldn’t know when it was safe to maybe emerge from their homes in the wooded areas, and so that makes it very frightening, absolutely, and ongoing. I mean, the concern now is, you know, “Can this happen again? Will it happen again? Will I be safe if I’m out in the wooded areas?”

Ms. John also spoke about the differential impact the mass casualty had on her community, the African Nova Scotian community, which is “also a very closely-knit community and so, although someone might be from Truro or Digby, they will still

connect with all of Nova Scotians across the province.” This community’s strained relationship with law enforcement, one steeped in racism, complicates the reaction to the mass casualty because, as a group, their experience of safety has been constrained both historically and on an ongoing basis. She said:

[T]here’s been a shift in our collective lives. I think of the mass shooting and then we have the Black Lives Matter with the death of – murder of George Floyd and that is compounded on top of.

So in our community, you know, there’s trauma on top of trauma on top of trauma that really has affected us.

Dr. Keith Dobson described the wider rippling effects of the mass casualty:

So first I have to express my deep empathy for everybody who was affected by the mass casualty experience. This has been a trauma not just for people in Nova Scotia, but right across the country and, indeed, other countries as well. Certainly from Calgary we spent a lot of time watching media and trying to understand what was happening there as well ...

Dr. Dobson explained that people experience a range of trauma responses and employ a range of coping strategies. He encouraged everyone to “do the things that are healthy for you” and in particular to make contact with other people:

Social connection is one of the main things we can do to rebuild trust, to rebuild our sense of safety in our social environment, in the people with whom we interact, and so if I had one sort of general piece of recommendation it would be for everyone as much as possible to re-establish or establish, if they didn’t have them before, social connection.

All the panellists provided their perspective on ways to cope with the ongoing effects of the mass casualty, in small ways and large ways, acknowledging that the work of the Commission could intensify this impact. Ms. Myers proposed taking a forward-looking wellness perspective and asking questions: With “the Commission moving forward, as we find out more information ... what do we want? What do we want in our community? The seeds of hope are there, and let’s work on that together.” Ms. Cunningham also emphasized building connection: “[I]t’s not always about helping a great number of people. **It’s about helping the neighbour**

next door.” Ms. Cann focused on hope, expressing the view that hope comes from “places of shared empathy and shared emotion and shared care” and from taking small steps forward: **“That really is hope in action.”**

Ms. Hay remarked that the increase in calls to the Kids Help Phone from children and youth in Nova Scotia is a positive phenomenon because **reaching out is a step forward.** To her it was an indication there is silver lining here in the resiliency and courage of the folks in Nova Scotia.

Ms. John also accentuated the positive:

[W]e are – in Nova Scotia, I’d say we’re a community of communities, and we really do look out and step up for one another, and we’ve seen that throughout COVID, just really making an impact and ensuring that Nova Scotians were safe from COVID. And I think that, you know, as we move forward, recovery is going to take some time, but I encourage people to be gentle with themselves, to be able to recognize how they are impacted by this, because they may not feel a connection, but if they think about all that is going on has occurred over the last two years, and this mass casualty has really affected us all, I think we need to just really take some time to be gentle and allow yourself to feel those emotions and move through those emotions.

Consultative Conference with Indigenous People

In September 2022, the Commission held a consultative conference with Indigenous people on community safety and well-being. Cheryl Copage-Gehue, Indigenous community engagement advisor for the Halifax Regional Municipality and council member for Sipekne’katik First Nation, facilitated this session. As speakers entered the talking circle, she invited them to speak about their experience of the mass casualty as the first step toward a broader conversation about safety.

Consultative Conference with Indigenous People, September 13, 2022

- Cheryl Copage-Gehue (co-facilitator), Indigenous community engagement advisor for the Halifax Regional Municipality and council member, Sipekne'katik First Nation
- Noel Brooks, manager of community and public safety, Millbrook First Nation
- Elder Marlene Companion, member of the Qalipu First Nation
- Juliana Julian, health director, Paqtnkek Mi'kmaw Nation
- Lena Knockwood, council member, Sipekne'katik First Nation
- Luke Markie, security guard, Millbrook First Nation
- Clifford Paul, coordinator, Moose Management Initiative, Unama'ki Institute of Natural Resources; member of the Mi'kmaq Advisory Group, RCMP H Division
- Philippa Pictou, director of policy and planning, Tajikeyimik
- Sharon Rudderham, director of health transformation, Tajikeyimik
- Karla Stevens, project coordinator, Circles of Support and Change, Antigonish Women's Centre and Sexual Assault Services; member of the Paqtnkek Mi'kmaw Nation
- Laurianne Sylvester, dean of Unama'ki College, Cape Breton University; member of the Membertou First Nation
- Jerid Watton, coordinator of Indigenous Outreach and Research for the Halifax Regional Municipality; member of the Glooscap First Nation
- Tuma Young, KC, member of the Eskasoni and Malagawatch First Nations; assistant professor of Mi'kmaq Studies at Cape Breton University

Quite a few of the Mi'kmaq representatives had direct experience of the mass casualty. Cheryl Copage-Gehue began by identifying the perpetrator's proximity to her community:

My community is Sipekne'katik First Nation which was very close to where Joey Webber had passed. Right where Joey had passed is right where our community physician, the majority of our community at the time before we had our health centre went to go see their doctor. And it's also one of our main routes where people are always going around fishing

and that territory. And it's also very close to where Constable [Heidi] Stevenson lost her life.

Ms. Copage-Gehue said that community members, herself included, were driving around on April 19, 2020, completely unaware of the danger. Two families that are off-reserve community members live right down the hill from where Cst. Heidi Stevenson encountered the perpetrator, and she described how “the young children were playing outside and went running in. And it was like, ‘Mom, Mom, there’s a fire. There’s a fire.’”

In addition, Ms. Copage-Gehue explained that on that same day a community member was run over by a vehicle. Although this accident was not directly related to the unfolding of the mass casualty, as a result of the perpetrator’s actions, emergency responders were unable to provide assistance in a timely way. The woman, who was seriously injured, had to wait one or two hours before Ms. Copage-Gehue was able to reach relatives who serve as voluntary firefighters to render assistance until the police arrived some hours later.

Noel Brooks explained that the perpetrator “stopped in our reserve. There’s people that were affected by it in our reserve. People lost people from our reserve – one person.” He also explained: “[O]n our reserve we had a lot of RCMP officers affected by it. That’s probably our biggest problem right now is lack of RCMP officers because a lot of them are not allowed on duty. I know there’s still quite a few people who still haven’t come back to work.”

Jerid Watton said that his reserve is located in the valley “pretty far from where this took place.” However, “[t]he chief of our reserve, Glooscap First Nation, Chief Sidney Peters, lives up in that area, so when this happened, we all began to worry about him and his family.”

Philippa Pictou explained that Tajikeimik, a health and wellness organization, was created to lead health transformation for Mi’kmaw communities in Nova Scotia. She remembered the reciprocal care and concern exchanged that day as she, along with her family members, struggled to learn what was happening:

Well, when it happened I was living in Onslow Mountain, just outside Debert. And everybody started phoning me to make sure I was okay. I hadn’t heard about it; I had been outside at the time. And so my daughter called frantic and said, “Go in and lock all your doors. Stayin your room.” So that was kind of a panic thing and then Facebook blew up. And then

I started hearing that he was going towards Millbrook and people in Millbrook had seen him and that's where my children were living. And so then I was starting to have the opposite panic thing about oh my God, he's going by my children and my grandchildren now, and feeling totally helpless. So stuck in my room, watching everything on Facebook and panicking about the safety of everybody in the community that I then wasn't able to even go and check to see if they were okay. And then everybody kept on phoning to check to see if I was okay, so like, between going on the phone and Facebook, I was just going crazy, wondering. I have a small farm so worrying about whether or not I needed to do anything to stick the animals out of the way, all of that. I was basically alone with that.

But it was also very triggering for me as a survivor of violence in the past because instantly I also went into protection mode of oh my God, I need to, you know, basically protect myself and my children. And then a kind of a trigger reaction.

Karla Stevens looked back on that day as a very uneasy and triggering day:

I just thought the uncertainty and just not knowing, like, the whole magnitude of everything that was going on and just, you know, getting bit and pieces of the information very slowly, which was more alarming, I think, to people that were in the rural and isolated communities, just to know what direction he was in, what direction he was going, if this was still continuing on, or how it was going to end. So yeah, it was a lot of uncertainty. I know for a lot of community members who felt, you know, triggered by all this, they felt – yeah, I just think the impact on myself was really a hard one. I did lose a friend, Corrie Ellison, in the shooting and he was a really good friend that I've known for, you know, 10-plus years.

I've lived in Millbrook for quite some time, so I was quite familiar with Corrie. I hung out with him multiple times but didn't realize that he was a victim until later on in that evening, when a friend of mine had called and mentioned that he was one of the victims of the shooting. And then we had realized the actual numbers of how many people were killed, so it was quite alarming. It was quite triggering for myself.

But to understand just how to move forward and how to be safe, I do have small children, so that was obviously a concern as well, and I had children away from home that are in school and things like that. So it was,

you know, just a layer on top of layer of concern, and just uncertainty of what was happening. So it was a really, really uncertain day. It was a scary day. It was filled with lots of emotion.

Juliana Julian was further away from the perpetrator's path. She remembered her concern for people she knew who lived in the vicinity and her broader concern for other First Nations too. She also recalled the stress of trying to learn about what was going on during the mass casualty:

I started in my own mind – and I know you get – your mind races when you don't know what's going on. So it's all those what-ifs. So in my mind I kept thinking what if he ended up in the community and he hurt somebody in the community? What if it's somebody from the community that hurt somebody off? And what I'm getting at is that whether we want to admit it or not, it would be a complete division of non-First Nation and First Nation, and what that would mean for all of Nova Scotia, all of Canada. Do you know what I mean? There would be such big implications if that were the case, regardless of whether it was the intention, if that was the intention of it, or anything like that, because my mind was racing. And I just thought, "What would happen if it did end up that way?"

Several people spoke about the interconnections between and among communities. Ms. Copage-Gehue pointed out: "And in Mi'kma'ki here, especially in Nova Scotia, all of our communities are fairly small, and we pretty much know everybody from every other community." Clifford Paul, a member of the Membertou First Nation in Cape Breton who works on behalf of the Assembly of Nova Scotia Chiefs through the Unama'ki Institute of Natural Resources, spoke about the many interconnections between Mi'kmaw communities and the shared impact:

[W]e're watching from afar here in Cape Breton. Unama'ki. We felt it for friends and relations up in Halifax, Millbrook, all those areas affected, you know, where the incidents occurred. And, you know, me and my friends, we have relatives that work for RCMP and have worked for Shubenacadie, Millbrook, Pictou Landing, and other detachments, not just on the reserves, so we were very, very astounded, really, that a lot had occurred before the public was informed.

Sharon (Paul) Rudderham, of Membertou First Nation, expanded the conversation about interconnectivity:

[W]hat it does make me think about is how such a traumatic event has occurred within the Province of Nova Scotia and how it has impacted across Canada. To me, it brings me to a different understanding and a different thinking. Understanding how this traumatic event had impacted everyone here in Nova Scotia, it brings me back to thinking about the connectivity that exists in our Mi'kmaq communities. Within our Mi'kmaq communities, many of you are hopefully aware of the historical trauma that has occurred because of government policies and the plan to eliminate our population. What I'm trying to explain is that when individuals and communities are traumatized and continue to experience compounded grief and continue to experience crisis situations – you know, we often hear on the news First Nations communities are in crisis. A Saskatchewan community just went through a traumatic experience with a mass casualty type of event as well. And I want to have people understand that when communities face trauma or these types of experiences, it impacts everyone. It impacts the entire community, even though you're not related.

Laurianne Sylvester suggested that

because of the connectivity within our communities, we're all looking out for one another. We're not looking within our own community. Every community is connected. When something happens in Sipekne'katik, we feel that. When something happens in Eskasoni, we feel that. If it's in one of the other districts of Mi'kmaq in New Brunswick, Quebec, PEI, we feel that.

Mr. Paul also spoke about how the absence of a post-incident debrief caused a further impact:

I know Covid prevented us from getting together to debrief. Community members, especially in Millbrook, who had such close contact with the potentiality for more casualties were high there and I think – I think, as other participants have said, we needed avenues, and venues, and Elders, and communities to come together to deal with the immediate grief, to de-escalate what was happening in our own minds, I guess, that debrief, and that was very important. I think Covid prevented that, too, at

that time, because we couldn't really gather as much as we could have or should have, so I'm hopeful that discussion will – discussions, actually, and input from our community members will inform people that, you know, we're there. We feel it. It's heavy on our souls, and it will always be continual heavy on our souls, you know, because it's a disaster and it's something that's going to take a while to just deal with the facts and information.

Elder Marlene Companion is associated with the Mi'kmaw Native Friendship Centre and the Elders' Council, both in Halifax. She shared her reflections, adding a longer-term perspective:

I know that in the urban community when this first happened, people were in shock. They didn't know what to say. And many of the people that hang out at the Friendship Centre and various groups, universities and whatever, don't really understand the geography of Nova Scotia and didn't realize how close it was to the urban centres.

After things began to settle down a little bit, people began to chatter and chatter and I had a conversation with some women and Elders of urban Halifax and the thing that was most prevalent is, "What happens to the children?" Like what do we – or what is the Commission and what is the government going to do about the children?

We know from first-hand experience what generational trauma is. And although it's been years and years, the children that aren't even born yet are going to feel the effects of this situation, this mass murder.

Share Your Experience Survey

The Commission employed a range of strategies to gather information about the mass casualty, including document review, research, public proceedings, and public engagement activities. One avenue was a survey inviting members of the public to share their experience about how they were affected by the mass casualty. We present an overview of what we learned in this section and describe the initiative in the text box.

Share Your Experience

The mass casualty had a far-reaching impact within and beyond the communities most affected. As the Commission developed the core evidentiary foundation through witness interviews and document review, it became clear that we required additional mechanisms to seek input about these broader repercussions. Our early public outreach efforts had also shown us that many people were seeking a way to connect with the Commission about what they had encountered during and in the aftermath of the mass casualty and its continuing ramifications. For example, some people used the Commission’s general inquiries email address to communicate what they were going through because of the mass casualty. We also heard from many people who were deeply affected by the mass casualty but hesitant to talk about their experience. Several of them explained that they knew other people who had been more directly affected – their friends or neighbours may have lost a family member, for example, and they were reluctant to “make a fuss” about their experience. We wanted to capture the full community impact – the ripple effect – of the mass casualty. To better understand these effects, in early 2022 we invited interested people throughout Nova Scotia, all of Canada, and other countries to take part in the Share Your Experience survey.

The Share Your Experience approach was informed by input we received at the Commission’s community open houses and through a web-based survey in the fall of 2021. We invited people to provide input and to participate through the Commission’s website, proceedings, regular stakeholder updates, and social media channels. While most people chose to participate via an online survey, those who preferred other ways to share their experience were able to take part via a phone call, email, or a letter through the postal system.

To help us learn more about the types of people taking part, we asked survey respondents if they identified with one of a number of groups, including those most affected, first responders, affected community members, members of the public (in Nova Scotia, all of Canada, or another country), and advocacy groups. Respondents were then invited to answer these questions (see also Annex A: Sample Documents):

- What was your experience during the events of April 18–19, 2020?
- Rate your sense of safety in your community (1) before April 2020, (2) in the weeks following the mass casualty, (3) present day.
- What was your experience in the weeks and months after the events?

- Have these events changed your day-to-day activities and/or behaviours, and how?
- Have these events affected your mental health and/or well-being? If yes, how?
- Are there any examples of your community coming together or of community support efforts after the mass casualty that you would like to share?
- Is there anything else you want the Commission to know about the impact of the events on you or your community?

People who identified as being first responders had the opportunity to answer additional questions, including if and how the mass casualty had affected their work. These survey response questions helped inform the Commission's work to better understand and engage with people working in police organizations and other kinds of emergency response.

The survey allowed anonymous submissions, taking into account that some people who had suffered traumatic experiences preferred not to give their names. It included the option for respondents to provide contact information if they were willing to have the Commission follow up with more questions. The survey began with advice about wellness supports, and members of the Commission's community public engagement team alerted members of our mental health and wellness team if a submission indicated that the respondent required assistance or support, enabling them to follow up where needed.

The Share Your Experience survey closed at the end of March 2022. Well over nine hundred Canadians and interested people from other countries took part. The survey assisted us in building our understanding of the experiences of people in a range of different locations, contexts, and settings, including those living in affected communities and those working as first responders. While responses varied, key themes from the responses included concern over the negative mental health effects arising from the mass casualty, the sense that communities or public spaces were less safe following the mass casualty, and a call for more access to and education about support services for people who have experienced trauma or require mental health assistance. All survey responses were reviewed by the Commission and helped to inform our work, including our proceedings and this Report. A summary and analysis are included in Annex B: Reports.

Survey Respondents

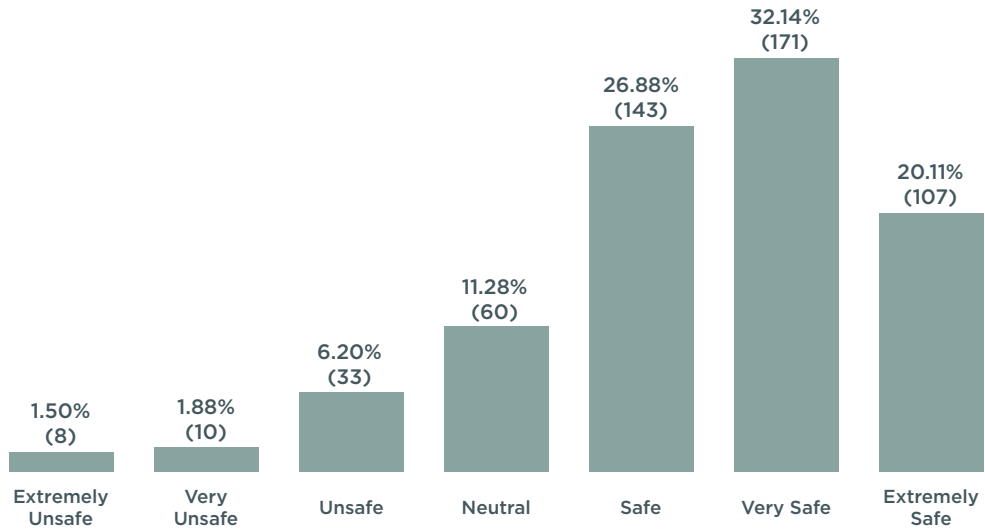
The Commission received 928 responses to the online Share Your Experience survey and additional responses through emails and, on request, through interviews. Just over 50 percent of respondents identified themselves as “member of the public in Nova Scotia,” and almost 25 percent identified as an affected community member. The next largest group was “member of the public in Canada” (17 percent). Of the total number, 72 respondents, or just under 8 percent, considered themselves to be among the group of “those most affected.” Among the survey respondents, 85 identified themselves as a first responder or a critical service provider (primarily police). Some respondents identified themselves both as “those most affected” and as responders and service providers.

We provide an overview of the survey responses below. In Volume 4, Community, we integrate the input we received on specific issues, such as on the impact of public alerting and communications and the use of the replica RCMP cruiser and police disguise, in our examination there of those issues. As noted above, the full report is available in Annex B.

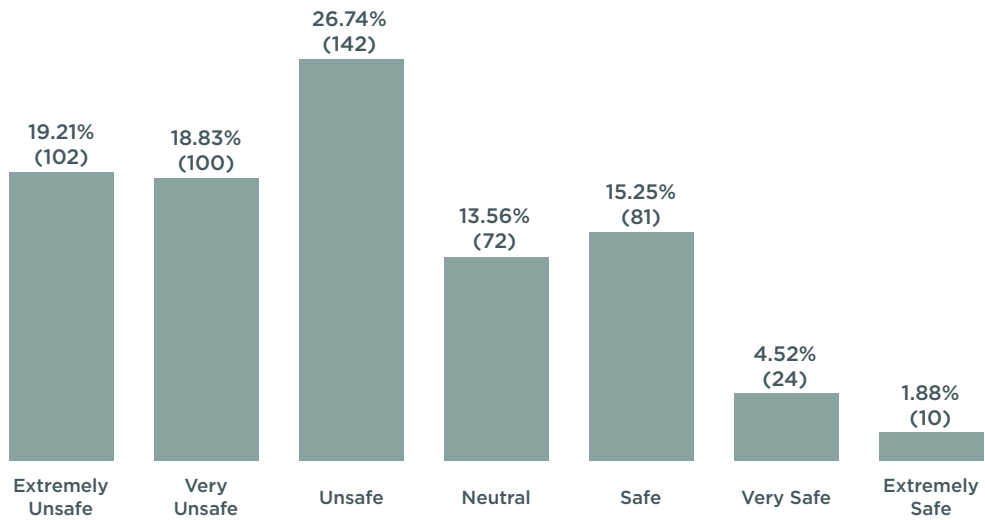
Perception of Community Safety

Participants in the Share Your Experience survey were asked to rank their perception of community safety at three points: before the mass casualty, in the weeks following, and “present day” – that is, February to April 2022. The responses are set out in the graphs below. There was a significant decrease in the perception of safety after the mass casualty, and the feeling of being unsafe continues for many people today. Before April 18 and 19, 2020, 78 percent of respondents perceived their community to be safe, very safe, or extremely safe. In the weeks following the mass casualty, only 20 percent continued to feel safe. By the spring of 2022, the percentage of people who felt safe had increased to just over 30 percent. It is notable that the percentage of those who perceive themselves to be extremely unsafe has remained relatively high. Less than 1.5 percent of respondents reported feeling extremely unsafe before the mass casualty, while 19 percent did so in the weeks following the mass casualty; almost 9 percent still perceive themselves to be extremely unsafe. The respondents’ perceptions of community safety, represented

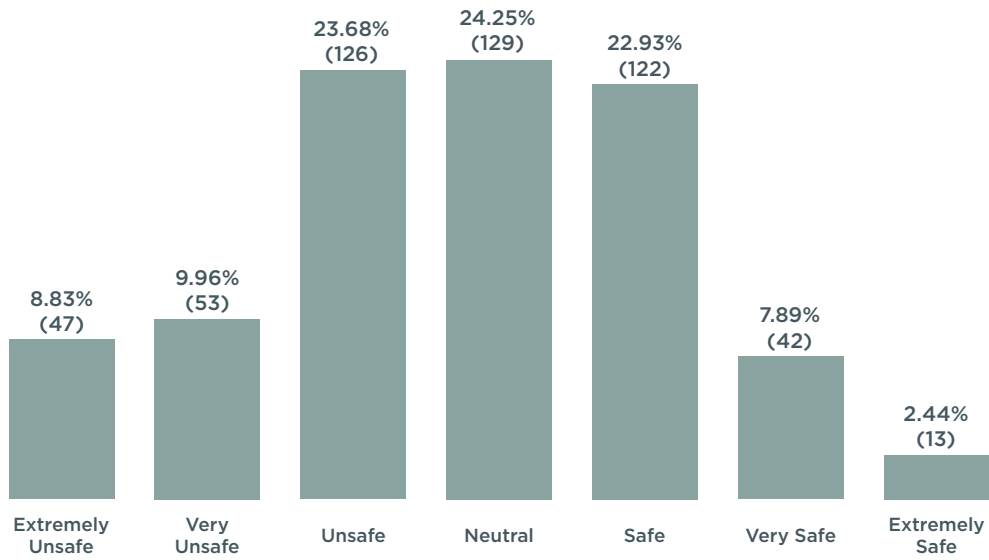
here in numerical terms, is also borne out in the responses to the other survey questions summarized here.



Perception of Community Safety Before the Mass Casualty



Perception of Community Safety in the Weeks Following the Mass Casualty



Perception of Community Safety, February–March 2022

Connection to the Mass Casualty and the Initial Impact

The first survey question asked: “What was your experience during the events of April 18–19, 2020?” The responses covered a range of topics and are summarized under these themes:

- Connection to the mass casualty
- Key words used to describe the initial reaction
- Concern for others
- How respondents learned about the mass casualty
- Lack of communication, information, and alerting
- Immediate impact and actions taken

Connection to the Mass Casualty

Some respondents had direct experience of the mass casualty either as witnesses or as first responders. Many others knew one or more of the victims, either directly or through a friend, and/or know one or more of the first responders or service providers who assisted in the response. Others described their connection as

living in the area either at present or in the past, living close to the affected area, living in rural Nova Scotia, or knowing other people living nearby. Some described their association as being a “concerned citizen” or “Nova Scotian.” One individual stated: “EVERYONE in Nova Scotia and the Maritimes is connected in some way.”

Some respondents shared how their position or previous experiences shaped their connection to the mass casualty. For example, first responders and other service providers who were not involved on April 18 or 19, 2020, identified themselves in those terms. A number of respondents also shared their experience as former victims of gender-based violence, particularly intimate partner violence, and described how this connection had an impact on their experience of the mass casualty. Others described their connection to the mass casualty as experienced through the prism of other types of violence, trauma, or losses of loved ones.

Key Words Used to Describe the Initial Reaction

Many respondents used strong language to describe their initial reaction to the mass casualty: “unbelievable fear,” “shock,” “terror,” “terrifying,” “sheer terror,” “horrifying,” “horrific nightmare,” “anger,” “disgust,” “fury,” and “outrage.” Alongside and integrated with the terror were expressions of “sadness” and “extreme sadness,” “grief,” “heartbreak,” and “devastation for the families.” A third strand of reactions was one of “disbelief,” “confusion,” and “bewilderment” that something so horrific could happen “so close to home” or “in our province.” In many cases, the expression of disbelief and confusion focused on the police response. Dismay over the lack of information was a key aspect of the initial response over the course of April 18 and 19, 2020. A smaller number of respondents who knew the perpetrator expressed shock and disbelief concerning his actions.

What we heard:

Words of people responding to the Share Your Experience survey



Respondents frequently described their reaction as including a range of emotions:

- “Nervous, broken-hearted, angry, scared.”
- “Sadness for all involved. Fear, anxiety of it happening too close to home.”
- “Absolutely terrified and extremely uncertain of the events that had unfolded.”
- “A sense of anxiety. Empathy for all families who lost loved ones.”

Quite a few respondents described an arc of reaction during this initial period. For example, they described the trajectory of reactions as starting with “shock, then sadness, then anger and confusion,” or “sorrow then wonderment at policing system then deep sadness and confusion,” or “shock to sadness to anger to distrust of police.” These five examples highlight common themes:

- “I live in a rural area of Nova Scotia, about an hour’s drive away from the event. At first it was just a numb shock that something like this was happening in Nova Scotia, but it grew to anxiety that it was possible that he could be headed in the direction of my community.”
- “I felt fear as I had seen neighbours, including children, outside that morning playing, walking, running, without any idea of the potential safety risk in the near proximity. Also, fearful knowing that this tragedy evolved on the 18th while we were unaware, sleeping and in the vicinity.”
- “I was deeply saddened by the events of April 18–19, 2020. I remember the day and feeling the dread and paranoia of knowing that there was an active shooter on the loose in our province. Although I do not live in the counties affected or personally know any of the victims or their families, I felt that all of Nova Scotia was collectively holding our breath. We all felt the devastation that such an event could occur in our beloved province. I remember seeing the tweets regarding the whereabouts of the events and being unsure if the shooter would make their way into the city.”
- “1. Shock and disbelief that such a horrendous crime could ever happen among such laid back, relaxed, friendly, kind, caring, neighbourly, generous people in any community in Nova Scotia. 2. Fear that a family member or friend may have been a victim. 3. Sadness and empathy for the victims, their families, police, first responders, Nova Scotia. 4. Strength to reach out and

stand with my children via social network photos and communications in service and support.”

- “Shock and Confusion due to lack of accurate, up to date information being available. Fear for safety of family, friends, coworkers. Devastation upon hearing of the loss of coworkers of 20+ years to such violent circumstances. Continued shock attempting to come to terms that the events took place in NS, in close knit communities, close to home, and to such innocent members of these communities. Anger due to lack of notification(s) being sent to the public. Incredible sadness of the magnitude of the losses of life and the impact to the families of the victims and the survivors of the events.”

Concern for Others

Many respondents shared their concerns for those directly affected, including family members of the victims, witnesses, and first responders. In the words of one respondent, echoed by many others, the reaction was a “heavy heart and grief for those most affected.” Another stated: “But mostly I am haunted by the victims. Were they afraid? Did they suffer? I truly think this could have been prevented.” Others extended their expressions of concern in a more encompassing way – for example, one respondent wrote: “We consider ourselves to be fortunate ... but our hearts continue to ache for the lives lost, the families who lost loved ones, and the RCMP and first responders and their families who will never be the same as a result of this horrific event.”

Another major theme was a concern about the impact of the mass casualty on children. Concern was expressed for the children who witnessed the events on April 18 and 19, 2020, including the fires, and those who knew the victims. Several respondents also expressed concern about how and what to tell their children and about the difficulties involved in “trying to stay informed but not let kids hear.” One parent / caregiver stated they were “[s]addened by the loss of innocence my son would experience when we would finally tell him about what happened.” They explained how they decided not to tell their child until months after the mass casualty, as they felt it was too much for someone so young to process.

How Respondents Learned About the Mass Casualty

Respondents learned about the mass casualty in a variety of ways and at different points over the course of April 18 and 19, 2020. Some learned either directly from an RCMP tweet or when the tweet was relayed on other social media, or when the tweet was reported on the radio or television news. Many relayed how learning about the mass casualty as it was happening was “just by chance.” In some cases, respondents shared the experience of learning through “word of mouth” or a phone call or other message from a concerned friend or family member, including, in several instances, from people outside Nova Scotia.

Many respondents described how, after they first learned that a dangerous event was unfolding, they searched for further information. Many described the difficulties they encountered and a growing level of frustration and “franticness” over time. Several mentioned they learned both “information and rumours” on social media, and that in some cases the information was “horrific and confusing.” Still others had no awareness of the mass casualty until after it had ended, despite the fact that they were close to the events.

Several respondents reported that the RCMP tweet left them with the impression that the active shooter situation was an isolated event, and a few remarked that it was likely “a domestic dispute.” As a result, many respondents explained they went on with their plans only to learn later that the situation was unresolved. In the words of one respondent: “I recall before going to bed around 2200 reading a tweet about RCMP addressing a firearms complaint in Portapique. The next day 22 people were dead.”

Lack of Communication, Information, and Alerting

A large number of respondents were critical of the RCMP’s use of Twitter to notify the public of the actual and potential danger over the course of April 18 and 19, 2020. We include an overview of these comments in our discussion about public alerting in Volume 4, Community.

Several police officers working during the mass casualty also reported a problematic lack of communication. One respondent said:

I worked the night the shooting started. I spent some time watching the highway into Amherst for vehicles associated to the shooter. I was not told that he was in a marked police vehicle. Had he come toward Amherst I would have pulled up to the police vehicle he was in and asked what was going on. It was not until hours later that I learned he was in a police vehicle. The many calls I received from family and friends concerned about me and fellow officers was overwhelming.

Some respondents shared their views on how the lack of clear communication by the RCMP in the days after the mass casualty compounded the negative effects. This comment voices an oft-repeated perspective: “Very little information was provided by RCMP even after the event was over. When you don’t get information and facts your mind tries to fill in the gaps.”

Immediate Impact and Actions Taken

Several respondents shared their experience of being directly involved during the mass casualty and described being “scared for our lives,” hearing gunshots, and doing what they could to keep themselves, their families, and their pets safe. They also reported letting others know they were safe and contacting neighbours to share information. Other respondents described frantically trying to reach members of their family; some also described the ways in which they learned of the deaths of family members.

Many respondents reported hiding in their homes during the mass casualty, including those who lived close by and others who identified themselves as living in Halifax. Another safety strategy shared by one respondent was to stay on the phone with adult children until they heard the news that the perpetrator had been shot. Here are four examples of the experiences shared through the survey:

- “We had to hide in our basement and park our car blocking our driveway as we read reports that the shooter was sighted closer and closer to Enfield where I live. I felt angry and unprotected.”
- “I dressed in all dark colours and wore shoes in case I needed to run. I sat in my living room listening (quietly) to an emergency line, where we heard of fires in Wentworth and later a car accident involving police cars near Elmsdale. We also checked our social media and followed along with the RCMP tweets. I

fielded messages from friends and family across Nova Scotia, Canada, and as far as Bermuda.”

- “I left our cottage to run an errand. I just got out of my driveway when I got a call from a friend saying the shooter was in Wentworth. I immediately pulled into another friend’s driveway and ran into their place. I wasn’t supposed to be socializing inside with other people at that point in the pandemic but we were so scared and worried, we took the chance. We huddled in their place – glued to our phones and radio trying desperately to get some information about the evolving situation.”
- “Closed curtains told kids to stay away from the windows though did not tell them what was going on.”

Another common reaction was to reach out to help others: “to warn each other to stay home, to stay off the roads”; “by helping in getting information to people from away about why people not answering phones”; and “to help and support first responders.” Responses included:

- “I spent the remainder of the morning reaching out to my family and friends in Cumberland / Colchester / Hants counties and desperately hoping this person, who we knew nothing about, wouldn’t end up in their community, their yard. I was in constant contact with my sister, making a safety plan with her as she lives alone. I also found out later that day that I knew several of the deceased – and that’s the thing about Nova Scotia, everyone was impacted in some way.”
- “I called as many people around my area as I could to tell them to lock their doors and be on guard because at this point we have no idea where he is headed. It was one of the most horrific nights of my life.”

Some expressed feeling conflicting pulls between helping others and being very worried about the safety of family members:

Everyone was feeling quite desperate for information. My family members were getting into their vehicle to head into Truro when they became aware of the RCMP vehicle, so decided to stay home. I recall feeling very helpless – trying to provide support to the staff who were responding / had responded to the situation (child welfare social workers called to assist with the children), while feeling very worried for my family members and their safety. I was also keenly aware that we ourselves live in a

fairly secluded area, and because the only solid information seemed to be coming through social media, becoming very anxious when there was speculation that the vehicle may be headed to HRM [Halifax Regional Municipality]. In the days after, I recall being very vigilant about checking door locks, keeping outside lights on, and not feeling safe to be out in our yard.

Several respondents who were away during the mass casualty or who live farther away expressed concern about not being able to assist: “Waking up to the news, it unfolded over the day. I was away at the time and it felt gut wrenching that I couldn’t be home with my community.”

Another relatively frequent theme during the immediate aftermath was the experience of sensing how an individual respondent, a family member, or someone they knew, could have been a victim. One respondent said:

A friend’s mom lives and walks regularly near where the pedestrian was shot and killed. It so easily could have been any of us. These are places we know and even if we don’t live there ourselves, our friends and family do. That night there was the most intense red sunset. It was beautiful and awful. We were all so deeply hurt. As the details continued to emerge it got worse and not better. The thought of those children on the phone with 911 for hours is very painful.

Some respondents shared their experience of the immediate psychological toll of the mass casualty. In many cases, this toll extended into the aftermath, and for some it continues today. For others, the mass casualty compounded past trauma, triggering PTSD flashbacks and terror at the events unfolded. The descriptions of the immediate impact include the following excerpts:

- “My daughter is a survivor who lost 11 neighbours. She was there at the time of the shooting and I spoke to her on the phone in the early hours of April 19. There came a time she went into her closet and I lost contact with her. I thought she was dead. I am still triggered by this today.”
- “Of course you’re concerned for the people there and then wondering how far the perpetrator would be driving and then as more information came out that it was a person masquerading impersonating an RCMP officer and even though I was a long way away from the incident, stranger things have

happened where someone could arrive under cover in my community ... your mind just starts to take off imagining different scenarios that might affect you.”

- “I had to stop watching social media and checking my phone for a while. All I could do was lie still and stare ahead. This just couldn’t be real.”
- “I am a VON nurse and I was working and listening to the events on the radio as they transpired. Everything was so unsure and scattered at the time, but when I got word that 2 VON employees had been gunned down it shook me to my bones. Two of our own murdered while doing our jobs.”
- “I went into shock and became anxious about my family’s safety in Halifax. I definitely didn’t feel safe until they reported that he was killed at Enfield gas bar.”
- “PTSD flashbacks and terror.”
- “I actually had panic attacks over what Const. Stevenson did in her final moments, she’s a true hero.”

Impact of the Mass Casualty During Early Weeks and Months

The second survey question asked: “What was your experience in the weeks and months after the events?” A few respondents reported that they continued “to live in the shadow of the tragedy.” This sentiment was echoed in the vast majority of responses. Respondents described the shadow of the mass casualty in a number of ways. Some respondents shared their personal experience of loss and sorrow, and many more expressed their grief for those directly affected. Others summarized their experience in one or more key words that capture the complex reactions experienced by many people. **One common thread was shock and disbelief that a mass casualty could happen in rural Nova Scotia.**

Many focused on their experience in seeking out and responding to information about the mass casualty. Another frequently mentioned theme was increased fear and anxiety and a decreased sense of security. Some people described it in general terms, and others gave specific examples of when and how they experienced fear and anxiety. Many respondents referred to it as a decline in mental health or a heightened concern about its impact on the mental health of others. Some talked about supports they were able to access, while others described difficulties in

obtaining support services. A smaller number of people framed their experience during this period by emphasizing the positive steps taken during the weeks and months after the mass casualty. Others connected their personal experiences to broader issues such as systemic racism, gender equality, and gun control. A few respondents reported experiencing no effects from the mass casualty during this period.

One respondent mentioned being “shaken by these events in a way that is somewhat indescribable.” In the ensuing months, it became clear that the experience was broadly shared because others too had “experienced the same fear and sadness.” Another respondent also expressed this sense of connection and shared understanding among those indirectly affected by the mass casualty:

We put hearts in our windows. We put flags of Nova Scotia up. I walked and thought, sometimes with tears flowing under my surgical mask. Nobody could see that I was crying, but even if they could, they would have understood and cried with me. I don't cry as much now, but on hearing the name Portapique, my stomach does a flip, I'm sure my heart beats a little faster. I live in Cape Breton, and the few times I drive up that way, I ache for all the people near there.

Personal Loss, Sorrow, and Expressions of Grief

Some respondents shared their experiences of personal loss as family members of someone whose life was taken on April 18 or 19, 2020. Several described the specific challenges they encountered during the initial weeks and months and the difficulties they had in coping with their loss, the “shambles” resulting from the mass casualty, and, in some cases, additional stresses such as illness within the family.

Others shared how they and their families were “immensely affected mentally” in the following weeks and months as a result of knowing those who were directly affected. Several told us that as more news came out about the fatalities, they began to realize they had a stronger connection to the mass casualty than they had initially thought. One person wrote: “I was overwhelmed by the magnitude of the numbers of the victims.” Other responses included these words:

- “Unfortunately, our family members in the area lost a close friend in the shooting, someone they relied on. So while there was immense shock at the

events, anger at the failure of the RCMP, it was mostly sadness and pain for our family members who were in pain.”

- “I am heartbroken for the loss of my friends. I am heartbroken for the tragedy and loss my friends are living and trying to cope with. I am heartbroken for the children who lost their parents. I am heartbroken for the children who witnessed their murdered parents. I am heartbroken for strangers who lost loved ones, I am heartbroken for the RCMP and first responders on the ground April 18th and 19th, I am heartbroken for the loved ones grieving without closure, without concrete answers and without respect and support from our leaders.”
- “Like many Nova Scotians, I experienced great disbelief, shock, frustration, and terrible sadness. It was hard to concentrate during the work day and the isolation of the pandemic didn’t help matters. Seeing the degrees of separation between myself and the victims shrink as more was shared by family and friends who lost loved ones as a result of the shooting was heartbreaking.”
- “It was devastating in so many ways, & in the days and weeks following, I found myself crying, sitting in silent disbelief & feeling helpless, especially because I was not able to see my girls given the pandemic restrictions. I shared tears with them over the phone. With time, and 6 degrees of separation (less in NS!), I learned more about the victims and connections. It got harder and harder to listen to the stories, especially those of children affected and the families of children who died. It is so hard to understand how this happened.”
- “Slowly finding out connections with 8+ victims.”

Another prevalent experience shared in survey responses was grief for the loss of lives and for families: “heavy grief for the families affected,” “heartbroken for families,” “devastation to hear stories of victims,” “I thought of the families.” Some extended their expressions of concern to others including police, other first responders, and the affected communities.

Some respondents shared experiencing both “relief that none of the victims were family or friends of mine” as well as “sadness and empathy for victims, their families, police, first responders, and the people of Nova Scotia.” Another wrote: “I was worried, shocked, devastated, sad that I lost my co-worker and happy that my husband was OK and came home safe that night.”

Some respondents described a generalized sense of loss during this period. Others shared how they experienced feelings of sorrow in response to specific situations – for example, “when driving in the area where people were killed” or “when seeing the memorials.” Those living in the most affected communities shared their experience of how their day-to-day activities were affected by the initial presence of additional police and by the large number of people driving by. Several commented on how this additional attention made their lives more difficult:

We were also constantly reminded by the never-ending parade of cars coming down our private road and then turning around in our driveway. My husband made a sign to put up at the end of the road that seems to be on every news story but didn't stop the gawkers. It felt like we were constantly on display at a tourist attraction.

Complex Reactions

Many of the key words used to describe the initial reaction to the mass casualty were also used in the responses describing the weeks and months after April 18 and 19, 2020. A combination of responses was again commonly reported, underscoring the complexity of reactions:

- “Trauma, anger, sadness, and fear.”
- “Scared, worried, sad.”
- “Trauma, disbelief, shock, sadness.”
- “Horror, terror, disbelief.”
- “Anxiety, exhaustion, fear, confusion, anger, frustration, disappointment, distrust, paranoid.”
- “Hurt, anger, sad ... all of the typical emotions someone would feel when a life is taken too soon by a monster in your home town”
- “Very sad for the families of those who were slaughtered. In a state of bewilderment that this could happen in NS. Angry that public safety was ignored.”
- “Sadness and compassion for all that were killed and their families and friends left behind to question and wonder what happened and what went wrong.”

- “Felt lost, hurt, numb and incredibly sad. I was worried about my friend’s daughter. Still in disbelief that something like this could happen.”
- “Numbness, extreme sadness, shock. Couldn’t believe this had happened. Kept thinking about all the innocent victims and the children left behind. Emily Tuck went to the same school as my daughter so we took flowers to the memorial at CEC [Cobequid Educational Centre]. Attended a memorial at work for Alanna [Jenkins]. Frustrated that more people weren’t warned to stay in their homes early on the 19th.”

One of the strong recurring themes in the reactions during the weeks and months after the mass casualty was a sense of shock and disbelief that the event happened in rural Nova Scotia. Some respondents regretted they had lost their sense of security – a feeling they had valued:

- “In the days following, I cried a lot. In the weeks following I was depressed. I could not understand how this could happen in NS and a quiet place like Portapique.”
- “Heightened sense of anxiety around emergency communications and potential for an incident in this province. Upset that my impression of Atlantic Canada as being safe was shattered. Incredibly sad for the people of NS.”
- “Betrayed by the police. Unsafe. Sad for the victims and their families. I would have waves of emotions where I felt like my idyllic rural life would never be the same.”
- “Sad, questioning, wondering how things got so far gone without Nova Scotians being warned about what was happening. It was a dark and surreal time. Still hard to face that it happened in Nova Scotia.”

Unanswered Questions and the Need to Know

Many people were searching for answers, and they took active steps to seek out publicly available information to try to understand the events of April 18 and 19, 2020. Some focused on getting answers to specific questions, such as where the perpetrator got his guns and why no emergency alert had been issued. A small number said they were unable to watch or listen to the news about the mass casualty. For example, one respondent wrote: “Full of sorrow for those affected by the

tragedy. Unable to read or watch or listen to the news. Overwhelming sadness for the families.” Another person shared:

I became very selective in what I read in the newspaper, what I'd listen to, like our whole neighborhood had either Nova Scotia Strong up or what-ever ... We did that. But I really because every little thing, just it just was, I think it was worse than the initial shock. So for a long time, I didn't look at anything. I didn't read anything. Even to look at the pictures of the 22 was very difficult. So I mean, and some of some of my family members were ... not OK with it, but they would read more than I would. Yeah, I found it very difficult. Extremely difficult.

A large number of respondents indicated they had “so many questions” and experienced “frustration with lack of information and clarity.” Here are a few representative examples:

- “Traumatizing. Desperately seeking for answers, and felt like there was radio-silence and that something was being covered up, why couldn't Nova Scotians get any answers??”
- “Stared at the TV day after day looking for hope in the horror of what happened. Cried often.”
- “I was craving knowledge. What happened. What really happened that day.”
- “Shocked and saddened that there was not more information being shared with the families and the public.”
- “In the days, weeks and months that followed, I watched and read everything I could about this unfathomable event. I was deeply affected by the individual stories of the victims and their families. I felt a tremendous grief for weeks. I searched for details that would explain why this happened but the information continued to be confusing and incomplete.”
- “I continued to follow every update from this story, trying to put the pieces of the puzzle together.”

Some respondents commented that media coverage helped them during the weeks and months after the mass casualty by providing important information – in particular, in providing information about the perpetrator's history. Others experienced media coverage as contributing to difficulties during this early period:

- “Anger at the way the press were trying to whip people into a frenzy with speculations about what happened and who may have tried to support the gunman. No investigation of the harm they were doing. Friends thinking that just because something is printed it’s true so they are upset over things that aren’t true, and they aren’t able to shut off their fear. Like the idea that the gunman was a paid informant so the police didn’t stop him.”
- “[T]he constant false information that was being shared by the media and social media.”
- “This event has very much strained my relationship with the media and with police service in the province.”

Many respondents commented that the release of more information did not contribute to greater understanding:

- “To this day it’s hard to grasp what took place, more so as details are released.”
- “Details and facts are confusing. None of it adds up. Make sense of why my co-worker friend died please.”
- “We have been following many Facebook groups, YouTube presentations, Twitter and any media about this tragedy. The very first information (within weeks) that was given to the public by any of the above, immediately after the tragedy, appears to be the most accurate. With the passage of time, the information became less clear and mixed. Early on we noted lack of clarity and change of information by the RCMP.”
- “I tried to pay as much attention to what the outcome was of this for as long as it was emotionally viable for me to do so. I got caught up in reading conspiracies about the incident on places like Reddit, and it felt like I was getting more information from the general public than I was from authorities. Even though it had nothing to do with me personally, as a lifetime Nova Scotian resident I was shocked and saddened by this incident for weeks, and even now whenever it’s brought up it is still difficult to understand.”

Many respondents shared their reactions to information about the perpetrator and, in particular, expressed fear, anger, shock, and disbelief about his history and possession of firearms and the replica police vehicle. Respondents wrote:

- “Just in shock and disbelief that the suspect had gotten away with so much.”

- “Fear that someone so hateful and destructive lived in my community of Dartmouth.”
- “Disbelief that nothing had been done about that individual despite being well known.”
- “We listened to the victims’ stories, their lost relatives, tried to understand the timeline of events. We were devastated. It was hard to understand how this person could possess these vehicles, weapons, etc., and not be questioned previously. It appeared that people had alerted authorities previously.”
- “Just general disappointment with the RCMP, the provincial government and federal government. All these reports of people’s past interactions with the gunman and the authorities just let this guy run around.”
- “Following the events as more information was known about the person was even more frustrating that this person was not on a watch list of some sort , as numerous complaints had been reported about his behavior and actions, also makes you wonder and doubt of the effectiveness of our police services loosing trust in the system.”
- “Anger and extreme frustration about people’s surprise that gendered violence leads to this many deaths. Hearing that the woman who was being abused by the perpetrator – that she was criminally charged is enraging. After seeing what the perpetrator was possible of doing, how could you expect her to do anything that she thinks might make him even the least bit uncomfortable. I found myself wondering how many police knew about this man, that he was purchasing gear and obsessed with police (e.g. the imitation police car) and did nothing. There is no way they did not know about the perpetrator – he was clearly at police auctions. Let’s get real.”

Many respondents framed their experience in the weeks and months following the events of April 18 and 19, 2020, as a response to post-event RCMP communications. Many said their reaction was shaped by what they saw as a lack of information, contradictory information, and lack of transparency. The vast majority of respondents who raised this topic shared their experience of disbelieving the RCMP accounts. Some commented that initial praise for policing turned to distrust and anger, as these examples reveal:

- “The info that the RCMP shared during briefings was slow to come and then just stopped, which led to mistrust and conspiracy theories. Then we started

to get leaked info through alternative media sources, which led to more mistrust.”

- “Confusion and anger over how poorly the situation had been handled and how poor communication was even after the event. To this day there are no answers around fundamental questions. It shook our faith in the police force and convinced us that the Canadian legal / police system is completely incapable of dealing with unstable individuals like the perpetrator.”
- “There was missing information or inconsistencies that made me wonder if we were being told everything that we should be.”
- “I tried to remain impartial as I listened to the RCMP officers (leadership) provide updates to Nova Scotia and that were unclear and not extremely informative. Subsequently as more information has become available my faith and trust in the RCMP as a force has decreased substantially. I feel the actions since the incident of the RCMP and of government in general both provincial and federal have been more focused on downplaying the capability of the RCMP leadership and ‘protecting the image’ of the force rather than getting to the truth, determining how this can be fixed (training, accountability etc.) so it may never happen again.”

Other respondents expressed “relief that the investigation was led by the RCMP, a police organization I have great regard and respect for over many years.” Many were “appalled by everyone getting mad at the RCMP.” For example, two respondents wrote:

- “I still find myself angered by people who criticize the RCMP and first responders who went to the scene to assist. My heart aches for not only those personnel, but also for the wives and children of those who attended the horrific scene, as they seem to be the other forgotten, unrecognized victims of this tragedy. One person is responsible for this tragedy. No more, no less.”
- “I searched online for information and was disgusted by the attack on RCMP and the common law wife. I feel like because the gunman was killed – the family of victims needed someone to actively blame. This entire casualty resulted in hating RCMP or police – and victims who survived. If the perpetrator had lived their rage would be directed at him.”

Several members of the RCMP and their family members told us about the impact of this anger toward the RCMP. We discuss these latter experiences in Volume 4,

Community. We also hear from a range of emergency responders about the effect of the mass casualty during April 18 and 19, 2020, in the weeks and months that followed, and its continuing impact. Some had been standing by but were not assigned duties on April 18 and 19; they expressed feelings of helplessness and survivor's guilt. Some felt effects on their mental health after having worked very hard at their jobs to bring the mass casualty to a close, dealing with the loss of a colleague, then learning that the public “blamed them for the mass murder” because it was not stopped sooner. The effect of criticism in the media made returning to their jobs more difficult. These responders felt the public treated them as “subhuman” and “criminal” and they now had to always be on their guard because they became “targets of hatred and disrespect.” Some RCMP emergency responders expressed concern for their families because they are living with people suffering from job-related depression and anger. Some people observed bullying of the children of RCMP members and other social fallout for their families.

There was a wide variation in whether emergency responders felt supported by their employers with appropriate wellness resources in the aftermath. Some felt there were adequate supports and others felt a lack of organizational supports compounded the stresses arising from the mass casualty. Many emergency responders described the fallout in their workplaces, with occupational stress injuries and related absences depleting their numbers and putting more stress on those remaining in their jobs. Emergency responders often downplayed their own needs for mental health supports but expressed concern for their colleagues. This group of responses is summarized in Volume 4, Part B.

The perceived lack of information was described as contributing to conclusions that there was corruption and a cover-up: “For a while, although transparency was obviously lacking, I convinced myself it must be for the greater good. However, we have reached the point where significant trauma is being caused by the lack of explanations. My sense of safety was shook by the events, and has been further shook by what feels like a coverup.”

The need to know more and a belief by some that information was being withheld galvanized some people to demand that governments hold a public inquiry rather than an independent review as originally planned. Inquiries are transparent and can compel witness testimony and the production of documents. These efforts were led by those most affected, and in particular by the families of those whose lives were taken during the mass casualty. The belief that the provincial and

federal governments ignored the families' wishes for an inquiry resulted in some respondents expressing additional frustration and distrust in government.

Always in Our Thoughts

For some respondents, the events of April 18 and 19, 2020, and unanswered questions about what had occurred were “always in their thoughts” during these early weeks and months. For example, one person wrote: “On edge and just couldn’t stop thinking about it.” Within this group of respondents, some described this experience as having negative consequences such as sleeplessness, fear, or a reduction in their ability to empathize or sympathize in other situations. This group of responses included the following experiences:

- “Always in my thoughts, every time seeing an RCMP car or station, every time driving past that scumbag’s office (thankfully those grimacing teeth were removed from that building, although that whole corner still haunts me). Every time I drove past Enfield exit – although not anymore, it’s been so many times since – that haunting day relived.”
- “For several months after April 2020, I experienced obsessive thoughts that my family or I would be harmed any time there was a knock at my door.”
- “Thinking over and over again about the children who survived and their horror that night. Trying to rationalize or understand why he would do this. And a loss of empathy and sympathy for other situations. When I hear or learn of other sad situations it doesn’t affect me the same.”
- “It was incredibly difficult to cope. It played on my mind all the time. I dreamed about it often. As the months wore on it stopped consuming nearly all my thoughts, and then I would just have the trouble of driving by the roadside memorials. Where I would usually start crying again at least twice a day. I would try taking other routes but they added a lot of time on my travel. I no longer cry when I pass them but also do not really like [the] constant reminder.”

Decreased Sense of Safety and Increased Fear

A large number of respondents shared their experiences of fear and a perceived lack of safety and security during the weeks and months following the mass casualty. A decreased sense of safety was described both in general terms and as resulting in consequences such as an inability to concentrate, nightmares, and difficulties sleeping. People described themselves as being “on high alert,” “hyper-vigilant,” and in “fight or flight” mode. One person wrote: “Less restful sleep, easily startled, easily emotional, more reactive.” The responses included these passages:

- “I had nightmares and was very concerned about my entire province and the well-being of others. My children were scared.”
- “Fear. I had trouble going into public spaces.”
- “I was constantly worried for my family. What if something like this happens again. I struggled to sleep at night. I had to talk to my doctor as I felt that my mental health was suffering from all of this. It took months before I felt anywhere near safe & stopped worrying about this happening again.”
- “Scared to go outside my home, could not breathe. Fight and flight mode 24/7 for 12 plus months. Harassed by media, very little support provided to us. Grief, trauma, secluded feeling, nightmares, tremors, terror, irritable, constant crying.”
- “In the weeks and months after as we began to learn more about what happened things continued to feel uneasy. Everything felt dangerous and there were several alerts about what in the end were relatively innocuous things that triggered massive feelings of panic where we immediately reached out to all our people to make sure they were safe.”
- “I felt I was on heightened alert – making sure my doors were locked. Night time was hardest as I didn’t feel as safe as I had prior to this happening. I worried at night that someone might break in to my home. I found myself constantly looking around when I was outside as I live in a rural area and my back yard is wooded. I felt like someone could be there even though I knew it wasn’t likely.”
- “My experience over the weeks and months was isolation. I was fearful to do the things I would normally do such as walking, taking long drives. I could not sleep and was afraid to stay alone. Hearing of other gun-related situation so soon after this tragedy influenced my trust in community safety.”

Quite a few respondents linked their increased fear to their decreased trust in the police and anxiety about police vehicles. We discuss these experiences in Volume 4, Community. Some respondents related how specific situations such as hearing fireworks or gunshots and driving past specific locations connected to the mass casualty could trigger fear and, in some cases, panic:

- “Personally, for at least a month, I was scared at night and didn’t want my immediate family members to leave me alone. About a week after the event, a neighbour lit firecrackers and when I heard the popping noises, I ran and locked both doors before heading to our basement. All I could think was that our neighbour was shooting his wife – I was rattled. This is not normal for me. After that first month, this type of anxiety began to subside but there is a certain level of fear that never goes away when you realize that evil-doers very much live amongst us.”
- “It was extremely disturbing to drive past all the properties in order to leave our premises. It was also disturbing to hear stories but no facts about the situation. Every time I hear fireworks, it takes me back to that night when I heard – what I perceived to be fireworks – but, obviously were not fireworks. It was strange not to be advised or even have a follow-up to see if we were okay.”
- “Hearing gun shots from gun range after incident was disturbing.”

Effect on Children, Grandchildren, and Their Caregivers

A number of respondents wrote about the impact of the mass casualty on their children and grandchildren. Parents and other caregivers also shared the difficulties they experienced in dealing with the aftermath while trying to assist children and protect them from learning information that was inappropriate for their stage of development. These responses included these descriptions:

- “I had nightmares and was very concerned about my entire province and the well-being of others. My children were scared.”
- “Crippling. We didn’t want to leave our house. We felt empty, our poor community had been shattered completely rattled. It isn’t safe anymore. The kids no longer feel safe in the hands of the police ... Both my daughters have severe anxiety caused by this, my youngest daughter won’t leave my side and won’t settle when her other siblings aren’t present at home. It has completely

uprooted our lives. My grandfather's birthday is in May and we went to his grave which unfortunately is literally the next lot from [the perpetrator's] house he burnt to the ground. There still was a sign that said dentist on the ground that my kids spotted. My son isn't the same as this has affected him beyond anything anyone could ever imagine."

- "I was shattered, my grandchildren still want to know everything, they as children worry about how they would be protected if something like this occurred in Alberta, they do not have trust in any police to save them after how this was handled in NS, it is just unbelievable how so many people could have died when police were notified so early."
- "It was extremely difficult to help my son through this. He was 9 years old at the time. His friend's parents work with the RCMP. He no longer felt safe in his community. Previously, if he had a nightmare or got scared at night I could always comfort him by saying we live in a really safe, quiet place where nothing ever happens. Once Portapique happened he no longer had that comfort level that his small hometown was a safe space. He developed an anxiety disorder and completely stopped sleeping. I hate that his life was so heavily impacted just by living in a community where this happened."
- "My fellow mothers and I supported each other when we had days where we would just cry. We couldn't release our feelings in front of our children and they were in lockdown with us. I remember hating the messages of Nova Scotia Strong coming from outside the province. It felt ridiculous. Strong? We had just had an event that broke us. Absolutely broke us - and people who have never experienced this are telling us to be strong. External help was not helpful. No one understood. The only words of comfort came from Sandy Hook and from Scotland. Places who had gone through mass shootings reached out and only they had words of comfort. They knew we were broken. They assured us we would be in a shock for a while. They let us know that what we were experiencing was normal in such a situation. That was helpful."
- "It was overwhelming and distressing. I felt that we had been violated as a community and the grief was enormous, almost impossible to bear. My 13-year-old daughter suffered from nightmares and severe PTSD, fear of fireworks, and any other loud sounds as it takes her back to the day of the mass shooting. She will forever be affected because of this horrendous act."

Decline in Mental Health

Many respondents experienced a decline in mental health during the weeks and months following April 18 and 19, 2020. This condition was reported as sadness, including extended crying, anxiety, feelings of being overwhelmed or of hopelessness, and for some people it extended to depression, PTSD, or a triggering of pre-existing mental health disorders. Others experienced “numbness,” “isolation,” and “living in a fog.” For some, the decline in mental health extended to physical manifestations, such as chronic headaches. This selection of responses illustrates the range of experiences:

- “In the weeks and months following I watched the news and social media learning about the victims and their stories. It was so sad and I was often in tears and feeling overwhelmed.”
- “Anxiety, very thankful my friends and family were safe, but [for] a lot of veterans in my family it was a major PTSD trigger.”
- “Fear, grief, confusion, chronic headaches.”
- “Experienced daily sorrow.”
- “Anxiety, shock, guilt, a stronger bond with co-workers and community. PTSD.”
- “I felt hopeless and as though nothing was being done to keep Nova Scotians safe.”
- “In the weeks and months following the shootings our community was in shock. I still remember the first times that I had to drive on the roads he had used during his rampage. I still remember the first time I passed an RCMP vehicle on any of these roads. It was extremely triggering. The grief and shock was overwhelming. There were days where I would function fine, and days where I would unexpectedly start crying. There was so much grief that hit at seemingly random times.”
- “Every time it was talked about I cried and wouldn’t be able to focus. I would feel sick and have trouble focusing. I was living in Bridgewater when the young man stabbed a cop and went on the run, and helicopters were flying over my house, and reporters were everywhere around town and RCMP were everywhere. I was really triggered by this event and any time I heard sirens, or the helicopter fly over my house I thought it was someone planning a mass shooting. I ended up in therapy for it.”

- “Yeah, I think pretty well trying to find some psychological help. And just every single time anything came out in the news it ... and it came out frequently, it just stirred up all those huge feelings of being in a state of shock. And yeah, the grief just kept rolling.”
- “We’ve been dealing with nightmares, being terrified every time we see an RCMP vehicle. Constant crying whenever a memory comes up. Inability to sleep for the memories.”

Some respondents reported they were able to access support services that assisted them during the weeks and months following the mass casualty. For example, one person commented: “I had nightmares for quite some time and did go for two visits in Portapique with the counsellor who was very helpful.” Another said: “I spoke with someone about feeling anxiety about the events even though not directly affected. They helped to guide me through some issues.” However, others indicated there was an unmet need for mental health services. Some providers of services also experienced difficulties. We discuss both these issues in Volume 4, Community.

Positive Steps Taken

Some respondents shared their experience of taking positive steps to assist those more directly affected by the mass casualty during the weeks and months after April 2020. Examples mentioned include the provision of pro bono services by members of the Association of Psychologists of Nova Scotia, organizing and contributing to fundraisers, and helping others to access the counselling they needed. These and other examples of the community coming together after the mass casualty are also discussed in Volume 4.

Continuing Impact

The Share Your Experience survey asked three questions about the continuing impact of the mass casualty: whether the events changed day-to-day activities and/or behaviours and, if so, how; whether the events have affected mental health and/or well-being and, if so, how; and whether there was anything else people

wanted the Commission to know about the impact of the events on them or their community. About a third of the responses to these questions reported no ongoing effects of the mass casualty, although in some cases the answers were qualified to some extent. Relatively few people responded to the last question about other types of impact. Some responses are harder to categorize but underscore the ongoing, broad impact of the mass casualty. For example:

It's hard to put it into words. So many things come to mind. I'm a rock-hound, I love to go to Parrsboro - I cannot ever drive past the Portapique Beach Road without thinking about the first hand accounts I heard of what happened there. Every time it's like a punch in the stomach. I get quiet for a while. If I'm travelling with someone at the time, I don't tell them how that affects me. They won't understand. It changes you. This has changed all of us in ways. In some ways we've pulled together and strengthened as a community and as a province, in other ways, we're damaged. Hurt. Fearful. Grieving. Angry. Confused. Questioning. Lacking trust.

Impact on Behaviour

The responses of those most affected by the mass casualty shared the experience of all-encompassing changes to their lives: “our life changed forever that day”; “it’s hard to put into words how much has changed in our lives”; and “of course they have changed for all who are left behind, near or far.” One person wrote: “Our sense of safety was taken from us. Our friends were taken from us. So our day to day activities and behaviors are very different.” Some of these respondents gave specific examples of day-to-day changes, such as finding it difficult to leave the house, changing employment, abandoning plans, and taking on some of the obligations that had been carried out by their loved ones before the events of April 18 and 19, 2020. Two common threads were not feeling safe and finding it difficult to leave the house.

Many respondents indicated they had not changed their day-to-day activities or behaviours as a result of the mass casualty. For some the response was a clear “no,” while for others the negative response was qualified by “not overly,” “not really,” or “not much.” Some felt it was important to not change their behaviour; aside from acknowledging and remembering the “great loss of loved ones,” they felt that life

must go on. One respondent said: “No, I haven’t changed my behaviour at all. You can’t plan for crazy people who snap. I don’t want to live my life in fear.” Some respondents qualified their negative response:

- “No major changes but I do consciously lock my doors and am more cautious about opening door to strangers. I think about the gunman impersonating an RCMP officer which leaves me uneasy.”
- “No change in my day-to-day activities and I haven’t been stopped or had an incident with the RCMP since that time but it certainly would be a little voice in the back of my head saying ‘are you real.’”
- “No, but I won’t drive into West Colchester, beyond Great Village anymore. I have trouble when I need to drive through Debert area. My vehicles and house remain locked, including when I’m home alone during the day. I check that my outbuildings (barns and sheds) are locked or latched securely.”
- “The events have not changed my day-to-day activities, but upon reflection I would have to admit it has changed my level of trust ... I try to be more observant of my surroundings and the activities within my neighbourhood. We keep our doors locked both at home and at our cottage now. The event shattered the innocence of our world.”
- “I no longer enjoy things that I used to love like driving in the Portapique, Wentworth, and Debert areas that I once considered so scenic now only remind me of horror or watching fireworks as the sounds are too much like gunshots, or even reading Harry Potter as the story reminds me too much of the orphans left behind.”

Many respondents shared that they had changed their activities and behaviours for “a while” but this was no longer the case. Some were able to identify a specific period of time: “weeks and months”; “not beyond 4-6 weeks”; “for the first year most definitely.” One respondent stated: “[D]id for a while but reclaimed confidence in people.” Other responses followed these same lines:

- “Not anymore. For a long time every time I saw the police I got chills. One night not long after the shooting a police man knocked on my front door late at night as I had left my garage door open and I was really scared to open the door for the first time in my life.”
- “Some relationships have become strained or dropped altogether, but otherwise my behaviour is largely unchanged. There was a period of elevated

anxiety when going outside for walks, but it has passed. I had some episodes of weeping due to stress, but those passed quickly.”

We set out the responses from people who said their activities or behaviours continued to be affected by the mass casualty under four categories: strategies undertaken to respond to increased fear and a diminished experience of safety; reactions to police vehicles and police officers; diminished trust in the RCMP; and diminished trust in other institutions and authorities.

Strategies to Feel Safer

Many respondents reported changes in their activities and behaviours following the mass casualty. One said the events “changed their worldview of safety,” and another that their “sense of security was gone forever.” Many people gave specific examples of how their diminished trust and sense of safety affected their lives day by day. Many mentioned being more proactive about their safety and told us about strategies they employed to feel safer: locked doors; being more aware of their surroundings and more cautious; following different sources of information, including Twitter, more carefully; and avoiding former activities and specific situations. A few said they had acquired firearms, and others stated they had not taken the steps they wanted to because the law “won’t let me defend myself.”

Many people also said they experienced diminished trust in others: “don’t trust anyone”; “lost some faith in humanity”; “lost faith in mankind”; “look at people with skepticism”; “more cautious even with people I know”; and “less likely to help a stranger.” Others have responded by becoming “more concerned about mental health of family and neighbours”; feeling a “heightened awareness about mental health / people who might need help”; or becoming actively concerned “about those most affected and trying to learn how to help.” Several people mentioned they were more likely to report concerning situations or behaviours. One said: “My career has been dedicated to serving those with barriers, in many cases those with mental health concerns. I think this event has made me more observant and concerned about risk analysis to prevent future events!” Another elaborates as follows:

Yes, my eyes are more open to what is going on around me and in my neighbourhood. If I saw someone with a replica vehicle, I would report it. Someone I knew who was not an officer dressed as one, I would report it.

I think we are all more attuned about the mental health of family, friends and neighbours because of this event in a location you would never expect and an event you would never expect.

Still others reported keeping in touch with family more. One suggested: “Love those around you more. Tell them.”

Some responses included examples of how people have altered their day-to-day activities or behaviours to regain a sense of safety:

- “I seldom leave my home and keep self defence weapons nearby.”
- “I now lock my doors every night. I’m not out in the dark as much as I used to be. The bumps in the night are now louder and more noticeable. Our serenity has been taken from us by one asshole!!”
- “For 30 years I never was afraid to walk along the roads in this beautiful Valley. Not anymore; I only walk with other people.”
- “More suspicious ... Vigilantes have not had our support before but we find ourselves locking doors more, even during the day, careful when out in the yard alone, going for walks – definitely not alone anymore, we’re much more cautious and while some may say that’s a good thing, it’s not comfortable. We worry more about family and friends and they about us. This is not our normal.”
- “Not driving along the shore the way used to.”
- “When I drive alone at night I choose to take more populated routes. I have trouble sleeping. I have a vivid picture of what happened. I can see the faces of the casualties before their murders. I check my door locks more often.”
- “Very much so as a VON nurse. I need to be more aware of my surroundings ...”
- “I don’t putter around our property without a care in the world anymore. I shut and lock doors. I’m hyper aware of my surroundings and no longer blindly trust authority figures as I had previously. Hunting season up here was too much. The sound of gunshots made me abandon whatever project I was engrossed in, and head in the house. I know it’s irrational but that’s where I am. I fill the bird feeders and head out back to the privacy of the backyard. A salesperson came to our door and quite frankly, I just ignored him and didn’t answer the door. Every delivery vehicle that pulls in the driveway makes me alert ... even though I know they’re just bringing me a parcel. Every day I think about the victims and their families. Don’t get me wrong, I’m still a

functioning member of society, but every day something takes me back to April 19. I think RCMP cruisers are the biggest thing that set me off. I wish I still had faith in our law enforcement entities but the powers that be hesitated and it cost lives.”

- “I haven’t given much thought as to how I have changed until now when I was thinking about how to answer this question. Still working from home, I can’t be alone in my house without every door or window locked. If a vehicle comes into my yard that I don’t recognize, I move away from my office window and into the hallway until it leaves. I didn’t even realize I did this until just now.”
- “I am far more protective of my kids, needing them to be safe. I am more easily impacted by fear and fearful of certain situations.”
- “I no longer trust people. I am a massage therapist, and won’t book clients if I am in the office by myself. I make sure the doors in my house and car are locked at all times. I am suspicious of my surroundings and people at all times now.”

Reaction to Police Vehicles and Officers

A second pronounced theme in the responses from people who said their activities and behaviours had changed since the mass casualty was the modification of their reactions to police vehicles and police officers. One person said: “Every time I see a cop I wonder who it really is.” Many respondents indicated they had trusted police before the mass casualty, although several said they now trusted police “even less” than before. Some people commented that they were initially very alert when they saw a police car or were afraid of being stopped by the police, but these fears and concerns had diminished over time:

- “At first, I would have been more circumspect if approached by a police car. As time passed, I dismissed these thoughts because this was a very rare event.”
- “For a long time I was very alert when I saw any police car. Not so much now.”
- “I believe I am now back to feeling comfortable in my own neighborhood but it took months not to be startled every time I saw an RCMP car.”

Many respondents reported a continuing negative reaction to police vehicles and officers. Some limited their comment to RCMP vehicles and officers. Many said

they panicked whenever they saw a police car, and others said they were very nervous or afraid or apprehensive about the possibility of being pulled over. Quite a few people said they wondered how they would react if they were signalled to pull over by the police. Others stated they would not pull over or would not do so if they were alone, in an isolated area, or until they had independent confirmation that it was a real officer (by calling in and seeking verification from the police detachment). We discuss this issue in Volume 4, Community.

Diminished Trust in the RCMP

A large number of respondents reported experiencing diminished trust in the RCMP or “frustration and dissatisfaction with policing.” Some identified this feeling as affecting behaviours and activities, while others did not. In other words, there was a good deal of overlap on this point between people who responded “no” to the question about ongoing effects and those who said “yes.” Responses included a wide range of phrases to describe the degree of distrust: “opinion of RCMP had declined”; “it has impacted my respect for the RCMP and my confidence in their ability to effectively and appropriately police”; “more wary of police”; “nervous about police”; “don’t trust RCMP as much as I used to”; “no longer trust the police”; “will never trust the RCMP again”; “fear the RCMP”; “scared to death of the RCMP.” Others said:

- “I have a lack of confidence in the police force to properly protect people and have a degree of suspicion of police.”
- “I fear the police. I will not call them in an emergency.”
- “Yes distrusting the RCMP. I used to have the utmost respect for them but now 0%.”

For some respondents, the lack of faith in policing was a consequence of becoming aware of the limitations on resources: “I don’t have faith that police services have the ability to respond and handle situations like this again. Their resources are spread too far. I have nothing but respect for the officers involved and I don’t blame them.”

A few respondents said they would no longer trust police spokespersons; for example, “I’m less likely to trust any press release or communication by the RCMP.”

Others focused on the loss of trust in the “RCMP as an organization.” One person said the mass casualty “reinforces my disappointment and anger with RCMP culture.”

Another respondent shared concerns about the impact of this diminished trust in policing:

It brought some people closer and others felt more alone and isolated than ever. No one ever imagined that this would occur in Canada, let alone our province or on our own street. I think everyone lost their faith in an institution that has been so steadfast in our country’s history. Now I think people are more focused on the redneck mentality of protecting one’s self, because the police aren’t to be relied on.

Diminished Trust in Institutions

A smaller but not insignificant number of respondents reported that the mass casualty had diminished their trust in political and social institutions and authorities. Many framed this decline as an extension of their lack of trust in the police or, more specifically, the RCMP: “I have less faith in the police and even less in government.” For some people, this diminished trust resulted from their disappointment in how long the government took to establish the public inquiry. A few respondents said they would “no longer blindly trust authority figures.”

- “I trust the government and RCMP less. I simply do not believe what they say at face value, I spend more time looking for information myself. I feel like the way that this sort of event was handled, combined with the many other times the government and its agencies are caught doing something corrupt and lying just causes division and makes citizens more likely to engage in activities like the truckers’ protest.”
- “Definitely changed our lives. I hurt and ache for so many friends and family that are suffering. I will never see my friend again. I have less trust for a system that since we were young, [we] were told to look up to. No faith in our justice system and the media to some extent. The world was watching and still is ... mistakes were made [and] those involved need to be accountable. Regardless of who they are they didn’t do their jobs to protect the people.”

- “So many unanswered questions that I believe the public has a right to know, as we continue to live in the shadow of this tragedy I understand there may be information that cannot be shared with the public right away as it may hinder the investigation; however, after nearly two years the RCMP have only provided information that causes more questions, or made statements that were clearly not true facts so it leaves me feeling like I cannot trust their word. I am sure the men and women working in the day to day operation of serving the public are doing the best they can, and I commend them. But I no longer have any faith in either the RCMP policing body, or the justice system in Canada.”
- “I grew up in the states and have only lived in NS for 5 years. I had always felt much more safety and comfort in NS until that day. In all honesty I’m used to shootings like this, I grew up near Virginia Tech and ran active shooter drills from the time I was in kindergarten. The shooting itself did not cause me to fear for my safety, the fear came from how wildly, in 2020, unprepared the province was to handle something like this.”

Impact on Mental Health and Well-Being

The second question about continuing impact asked whether the mass casualty affected mental health and/or well-being. Approximately half the respondents who answered this question commented that the events continued to affect their mental health and/or well-being, and half reported that they did not.

Many respondents who reported that the mass casualty did not have an ongoing impact on their mental health and/or well-being added qualifications to their answer. For example, some referred to ongoing grief or sadness for the families who were most affected and especially for the children. One respondent wrote: “The only thing I feel is the grief. For the families, for what we all lost, for the unanswered questions. It’s a grief that will last.” Another wrote: “No, because now!!! they use the alert system but it took 22 deaths in the process.”

Quite a few respondents told us that their own mental health or well-being was not affected, but they could see the impact on members of their family or on others:

- “I don’t feel it has directly; but I feel my parents and my siblings and family have felt the fear and are on edge a bit more.”

- “It has not impacted my mental health. I am aware of it when I deal with people from that area of Nova Scotia.”
- “Not me personally but just a few of our new neighbours.”
- “My wife’s depression is attributable to this event. I, on the other hand, do not seem to be suffering. We did lose some good friends and customers that day.”
- “Not my well being, that of my sister, her daughter and his close friends” [“his” is in reference to one of the casualties].

Another large group of respondents reported they were “no longer” experiencing negative effects on their mental health or well-being, or that the impact was “not as much as before.” Some respondents were aware that although the negative impact had diminished over time, the publicity around the Commission’s work had the potential to renew the effect on their mental health or well-being. Some people told us the Commission’s work was already having that effect on them.

Among the respondents who told us about the ongoing impact of the mass casualty on their mental health and/or well-being, some did so by quantifying the impact: for example, “considerably”; “to a small degree”; and “100% Life changing. Anxiety and depression and so much more.” Others described the frequency: “I think about what happened every day”; “overwhelming sadness from time to time at the loss of lives”; “my heart is broken.” Many described the ongoing impact as fear, anxiety, “high anxiety and not able to sleep well,” “getting sad and tearful,” or feelings of helplessness, depression, and PTSD. For some, the impact extended to physical effects such as “headaches when the topic comes up.” Sustained grief for others continued to affect people’s mental health and well-being. Several respondents expressed concern about the impact on the mental health of the wider community: “I think it’s affected a lot of people’s, including my own”; “lots of reflection. And sadness. I think it changed the entire province”; “the massacre affected everyone’s mental health. Nova Scotia is essentially a small town with a big heart.”

A few people reported experiencing positive effects along with the negative ones. One respondent wrote: “It has made me more aware of how fragile life is and to cherish every day. It is very important to me to remember the victims and their families especially on the anniversary.” Another wrote: “I value every moment, and try to worry less about the things we all fret over and value those close to me because it’s made me hyper aware of my own mortality.” One respondent shared:

I talk about them [mental health and well-being] a lot. I feel like I'm an ambassador telling people to be alert to the warning signs that we see in others. In a small town no one wants to speak ill of others because it may get back to the person that they're gossiping about. I bet all the people that knew [the perpetrator] are wishing they'd said more. I'm personally stuck on that day. I couldn't sleep and I didn't feel safe. The people that we expect to protect us didn't prevent any loss of life. This lunatic, travelled around shooting people as if he were in a video game. I talk ... to anyone that will listen. I don't worry as much about trivial things and it's made me focus on my close person relationships. I used to start weeping whenever the story came up in my daily news update but now anger sets in.

Some respondents continue to experience effects on their mental health and well-being due to the mass casualty and to other contemporaneous incidents or situations (the pandemic restrictions, other crimes, events such as the deaths of Canadian Forces members in the HMCS *Fredericton* helicopter crash, followed shortly by the crash of a Canadian Forces Snowbird that killed Captain Jenn Casey from Nova Scotia). These events were seen as taking a cumulative toll on individual and collective resiliency. Other respondents wrote about how the mass casualty compounded an existing condition such as panic disorder, depression, or PTSD.

Grief and Sadness

Many respondents shared the experience of ongoing grief and sadness as a result of the mass casualty. One respondent wrote: "I think it has affected many Nova Scotians' mental health in that we now know an event like this could happen here." Another said, "For the first time in my life I have felt broken and completely lost. I have been active in therapy since March 2021. We lost so much during those 2 days." One person said their mental health was "in the toilet." Another expressed a sense of hopelessness and futility as an extension of their grief:

I believe these events have affected my mental health over the past two years. I have grieved the loss of those I knew who lost their lives, as well as the collective loss of all the others, and the challenge of supporting each other during the Covid pandemic. But ultimately, I grieve the loss

of my innocence in believing the RCMP policing body is exempt from the power of corruption within their ranks. Whatever the outcome of the Mass Casualty Commission report, I no longer feel that the government will act on any recommendations that will effect any real change until the power of love outweighs the love of power. And sadly I doubt I will see that change in my lifetime.

Responses about the impact on mental health and/or well-being that focused on grief and sadness included the following:

- “I have never felt such a profound and lasting sense of grief. The victims have stayed in my heart. I feel a great need to know more about the personality and motivation of the perpetrator in order to better understand how this horrendous thing could happen in Nova Scotia. I need to know how much intimate partner abuse was involved, how much was known by others and whether more could have been done, and whether anything will change in our mental health and policing agencies. Knowing there would be a public inquiry that might answer some of these questions gave me some hope.”
- “In some ways I feel much more unsettled mentally, I anger easily when I hear of people who will not even try to feel what it must have been like out there in the dark trying to get a handle on this as it was happening, for both sides. I do most of my quiet time walking after dark in a rural area, so for no reason I sometimes end up thinking about what it must have been like. Why I do this I do not know. Why do we make our own selves sad?”
- “I’d say yes they have. It’s just so sad. He didn’t deserve it and he was just doing his best and his family was growing and he should be here now to enjoy it. And all the other victims, they were all so innocent. It’s hard to stop thinking about it, it’s hard to be as light hearted as it was before all this. I was quite a skeptic before this happened but I don’t believe much of anything or trust much of anything now for sure.”
- “Every time the topic of the shooting comes into the news or conversation, I relive the worry, terror, sadness of that night.”
- “I continue to feel deeply disturbed by what happened. I think about it often. I’ve cried tears and still feel a lump in my throat and my stomach sinking when I think about it. I grieve for these families that were impacted. Just the other day, my spouse and I listened to a song played on the fiddle by one of

the individuals who was killed. This was not the first time we watched this video in sadness, and it will not be the last.”

- “It has affected our entire family’s mental health, our children waking up crying that they miss one of the victims, our young son doesn’t understand why he can’t see them anymore.”
- “I hesitated to submit this survey. My connection with this incident is very peripheral. To say it pales in comparison with the experiences of the victims’ families is a gross understatement, I completely recognize that. However, without fail, what happened on April 18 and 19, 2020 has been on my mind each and every day since. The site of the Shubenacadie events is along a route travelled by multiple members of my family, multiple times each and every day. If any one of us had come upon the scene that Joey Webber did, we would have stopped to help just as he did. I am uncomfortably aware of how easily I could have lost a family member that day. There is nothing that explains why I didn’t and Mr. Webber’s family did, other than luck. That leaves me with a sickening feeling.”
- “I continue to feel sorrow for the family members of the people killed. I still cannot go for walks on the roads in my rural community out of a deep trauma and concern that something similar could befall me. It bothers me that it still bothers me to that level, but it does. It made me less trusting of the people around me, the people driving down the road in my vicinity.”

Increased Fear and Anxiety

As discussed above, many respondents shared the experience of increased fear and a decreased sense of safety and commented on how these feelings affected their activities and behaviours but not their mental health. Many others described fear as having an impact on their mental health or well-being. One respondent said the mass casualty “hasn’t affected my mental health but my well-being in terms of feeling safe, absolutely.” For others, the consequences of feeling less safe did have an impact on mental health: “Feeling ‘less safe’ is anxiety producing”; “Again, fear. Fear of not being safe. Insomnia, depression.” Some spoke in more specific terms about the “concern that it might happen again,” that “all sensors have been turned on high,” or “I think about my own life and dying in a horrible manner like that.” One repeated comment was the worry about “potential copycat experiences.” For

some respondents, the fear and anxiety was reported as a constant, whereas for others there are specific triggers such as “being in the area.”

Some survey respondents shared experiences of increased fear and/or anxiety:

- “I am more anxious because of it. I am always thinking the worst when I encounter new people. For example, I needed to throw something in the garbage at the Tim Hortons a few weeks ago, and because there were a few men in front of it, I got very panicked and just walked out with the garbage rather than get too close to them.”
- “I am scared of the dangers outside and that I’m expected to just lay down and be a victim.”
- “Anxiety at seeing police cars checking for numbers on patrol car looking for anything out of the ordinary. Going to Elmsdale and Big Stop is uncomfortable.”
- “I think of those families OFTEN and as someone with anxiety, I struggle daily wondering and thinking about what my life would be without my loved ones. I get even more anxious to think about authorities not helping me, especially if my loved ones were murdered.”
- “I, as well as my daughter, have suffered from PTSD as well as severe anxiety. We are both being treated medically for anxiety and panic attacks. We are now medicated, and have been for the last, nearly, two years. The sight of an RCMP cruiser still causes a physical reaction to this day.”
- “I easily become more emotional than before and have a hard time shaking it off. Bouts of tears and panic can come on suddenly and it will feel as though I cannot breathe. I find myself constantly creating scenarios in my mind and overthink how I would deal with them, what could be used around me in multiple settings as a weapon if I needed to fight, would I run? There is a huge lack in time response in notifying community members of such events. I am so fortunate that none of my family or close friends were casualties but how easily it could have been a number of people I love is deeply upsetting and the fact that notifying people earlier could have saved so many lives. I no longer feel safe. My view on trusting the government and police forces to provide safety to the community has drastically changed.”
- “Since then, a lasting unease with walking at night, being in smaller places outside the city, areas with no streetlights and few houses ... In the year following the massacre, there were several shootings and murders within East

Dartmouth, where I live. For the first time I started to feel unsafe in N.S., that the darkness of the rest of the world had finally come here.”

- “I’ve suffered severe anxiety since this incident. Although I am not a member of one of the families directly affected, nor was I a first responder, the lack of information via Twitter that day and the unorganized way information was shared led me to believe that the perpetrator could be headed to my community thereby leaving myself and my family terrified of what could happen. We have suffered a type of PTSD ever since and I cannot even imagine how the victims’ families and first responders must be feeling.”

Distrust of Police / RCMP and Impact of That Distrust on Well-Being

A number of respondents experienced a direct connection between their diminished trust in police (or more specifically, the RCMP) and their well-being. As discussed above, others saw this distrust as an issue that affected their activities and behaviour. This section provides examples of responses framed as an issue of mental health or well-being:

- “It has shaken my foundation of belief that law enforcement is there to protect you. The sheer number of people murdered was horrifying and listening to their families speak was so sad. It left me feeling depressed and anxious that I can’t protect my family and neither can the police.”
- “Less trust, more suspicion of the RCMP, the police, political figures, etc. Less trust means feeling less safe in public.”
- “Do not feel safe being policed by RCMP.”

Lack of Answers About the Mass Casualty

Some people identified the ongoing impact on their mental health and well-being as resulting from the lack of answers about what happened during the mass casualty. The responses included these statements:

- “My wellbeing? I have no wellbeing. Not until I know the real story of what led up to murders.”

- “My mental health, yes in a way, as for 2 years now I’m still wondering how the police failed to protect the members of the community when they needed protection most ... I want closure and in order to get that we need to have answers. Truthful answers.”
- “I really just need details and answers to fully satisfy my mental well being.”
- “I will say in ending, 22 months later we have more questions than answers, we have more scars than the day after we found out. With the RCMP ever changing narrative ... lack of info, it is more tragic than when we started.”

Unmet Need for Mental Health Support

Several respondents shared how their experiences related to the mass casualty were affected by an unmet need for mental health support for themselves, others they knew, or within the wider community. One person wrote: “Myself, I wish I had of reached out sooner for support, but I felt that others were hurting worse than me and did not think I should utilize resources.” One response read:

I am greatly concerned with the impact on mental health in our wider community. It has been my experience in the past 2 years that no investments were made in mental healthcare to assist our region. This makes it feel like our province and our country has completely forgotten about us. Waitlists are the mental healthcare we’ve received.

Many wrote about the scale of unmet need, and several responses emphasized that the inadequate investment in mental healthcare was their “biggest frustration out of the government response” to the April 2020 mass casualty. We discuss the issue of post-incident mental health support services in Volume 4, Community.

Other Impacts

The final survey question was an open-ended one about impact: “Is there anything you want to share about the impact of the mass casualty on you and/or your community?” We received a wide range of responses to this question, many of which touched on subjects already discussed in this summary but sometimes were expressed more succinctly:

- “Just that people are hurt. And sad.”
- “Just the knowledge of you’re never really safe anywhere.”
- “Shame in our national police force.”

One person wanted the Commission to know that people in rural communities “feel very on their own.” Another stated: “The loss of Heidi [Stevenson] was so tragic and sort of ended up overshadowed compared to when an RCMP officer dies. She threw herself into danger, knowing her fate (she had to know). She should be memorialized. More lives would have been lost if not for her. She’s a hero, and her children have no mom.”

Quite a few of the responses to this question addressed two common themes: there will be no healing without answers and accountability; and the importance of understanding the scale of the ongoing impact. A few also expressed concerns about hatefulness and divisiveness.

One frequent refrain was that “people just want answers” and “talking about it heals, information heals.” Several responses drew a connection between answers and accountability and the healing process:

- “We will never get stronger and trust without some authentic real answers. This was something no one ever could have predicted or planned. It was a war zone, and the responding officers did the best they could. Commanding officers knew better, there are resources all over the country that could have been called in on this.”
- “The impact on my community is that we need all the truths no matter how difficult they may be to some. We can’t move on until we know all the truths / facts and what can be done in the future to help prevent something like this from happening again.”

Many respondents emphasized the scope of the ongoing impact and its lasting nature:

- “That it does not feel like anyone understands what we have gone through. That there is a before and after in our lives. That we were not able to grieve and heal due to the timing of the pandemic. That our community desperately needs additional mental health supports. We currently don’t have our full complement of psychiatrists in the region, let alone extra supports. Giving us phone numbers for services that have years waitlists to them does not help. I

personally find it hard to see the Portapique community sign every time we drive through the community, which is often. It would be nice if a new one could be installed with WE Remember THEM on it. Seeing the identical sign to the one from that day brings me back to that day.”

- “This changed our community forever, a whole generation of West Colchester will never feel safe in our own homes, in what should be our safe place. We are without people who shaped our everyday lives.”
- “Just that the events had a farther reaching effect than just the families and friends of the victims and responders. Maybe more than some want to admit.”
- “We will forever be affected by the grief. Very traumatizing experience that will have lasting effects on the community and people directly affected.”
- “Has left a mark on Nova Scotia that will never go away.”
- “It will be with me for the rest of my life even though I was not directly impacted. I feel like people outside of the province do not realize how much it impacted Nova Scotia residents.”

Impact of COVID-19

A substantial number of respondents mentioned the COVID-19 pandemic as having an impact on their experience of, and reaction to, the mass casualty at all three points covered by the survey. In terms of the experience during the events, there was for some a sense that the limitations placed on them by public health restrictions had contributed to their safety or the safety of someone dear to them. The majority of respondents who mentioned the pandemic, however, experienced COVID-19 as compounding the negative impact of the mass casualty both at the time and later. Some of the responses underscored the relationship between the two:

- “In hindsight, I see this event as the first of so very many needless stressors and terrible events which put pressure on everyday people during the most fraught days of the pandemic.”
- “The fear of Covid and anxiety of lockdown were extremely amplified by the news that there was a gunman on the loose.”

- “It was occurring at the same time I was trying to understand the pandemic, so I can say there was a period of mourning, both the lost persons, the lost innocence of our province and the loss of some of our freedoms.”
- “Everyone was already on edge and scared due to the pandemic, but having this tragedy occur and seeing how pathetic the response was, pushed me over the edge, causing me to cry constantly and ended up being put on a high dose of anti-anxiety medication, and I wasn’t even directly involved.”
- “First of all it was during a pandemic and I was stressed from working as a front line health care worker and fearful of taking Covid home to my family members. Then this tragic thing happens all those innocent people killed, what those children witnessed, how those family members continue to suffer the tragic loss and how he escaped police so long. It’s so difficult still to this day to process how this could have happened.”
- “I was fairly far removed from the events, but I still feel a deep connection to home so it was shocking to see such a horrible event unfold there, on top of what was already an incredibly stressful time due to the pandemic.”

Many respondents experienced COVID-19 as an aggravating factor during the weeks and months following the mass casualty. In particular, people commented that normal grieving processes were hampered by restrictions on the ability to come together. Another common thread was that people felt they were already “reeling” from the early days of the pandemic and finding it harder to cope with the mass casualty. Some felt more fearful because of being isolated as a result of public health orders in effect at that time. Others specifically mentioned the fear that more violence could occur because of the pressures of being locked down.

In Volume 4, Community, we examine responses to the Share Your Experience survey in relation to the impact of COVID-19 on grieving, bereavement, and access to support in greater detail.

Part C:

Purpose and Approach

CHAPTER 4

Turning the Tide

CHAPTER 4 Turning the Tide

I learned that how we ache about an event matters, and I learned that that ache in witnessing an event impacts how we will trust relationships that try to take care of the effects of those events.

Dr. Signa Daum Shanks, associate professor of law, University of Ottawa, Commission Roundtable on Rural Communities, Policing, and Crime, June 30, 2022

The Commission's mandate was to inquire into and make findings about what happened on April 18 and 19, 2020, and in its aftermath; the causes, context, and circumstances giving rise to this mass casualty; and to produce this Report setting out lessons learned as well as recommendations designed to help prevent and respond to similar incidents in the future. It has been our responsibility to examine in public a series of actions that resulted in the death of 22 people, one of whom was expecting a child; that injured others; that devastated families, friends, and communities; and that distressed and saddened Nova Scotians, Canadians, and people living in the United States and beyond. To mitigate against the impact of this public inquiry process, our terms of reference directed us to be guided by restorative principles in carrying out our work.

The logic of public inquiries is that the public interest in learning what had happened, and how and why, requires us to shine a spotlight on painful and traumatic events. Potential harms revisited by the open and transparent information-gathering processes, investigations, and public proceedings are balanced by the outcomes serving this communal interest. In the case of this Commission, our work has been carried out in order to produce a clear and thorough understanding of the mass casualty as well as recommendations designed to contribute to greater community safety and well-being.

Our Report begins with a description of impact, including a selection of first voice perspectives about continuing effects. Words on a page can offer only a superficial approximation of the pain and loss experienced by the individuals, families, and communities most affected by the mass casualty. Despite its limitations, this acknowledgement – of the harms caused by the perpetrator’s actions, the significant inadequacies in responses to those actions, and the failures to take preventive measures long before April 2020 – is an essential first step. This recognition shapes our Report and, in our view, should motivate careful consideration, and swift and effective action in response to our findings, including through the implementation of our recommendations.

We also have come to grasp in a palpable way, the relationship between the deep and far-reaching reaction to the mass casualty response and a substantial distrust in police, particularly the RCMP, governments, and other institutions, including this Commission. The quote that opens this chapter borrows the thoughtful words and ideas generously shared by Dr. Signa Daum Shanks during our public proceedings. She was referring to lessons she had learned before the mass casualty, in response to a situation involving actions taken by community members, police officers, and the justice system in relation to Indigenous peoples. We thank her for imparting this insight and convey it here because it provides a perspective that is particularly vital at this juncture. **Understanding the relationship between aching about the mass casualty and the need to rebuild trust in the public safety system is essential to moving forward and undertaking the collective work required to promote greater community safety and well-being in the future.**

The time following the release of our Report will be a critical one for the individuals, families, and communities most affected, and for Nova Scotia and Canada. The Commission’s work has kept the focus on what happened on April 18 and 19, 2020, and its aftermath, in some ways extending the experience of the mass casualty itself. A significant number of those most affected who participated in the Commission’s work expressed the view that they would not be able to look beyond this mass casualty until after we completed our independent investigation and analysis of what happened, and provided substantial answers to questions about how and why it happened. Other community members also voiced this need to understand before they can advance in their lives. Dr. Megan McElheran, a practising clinical psychologist in Calgary, explained how these views accorded with what she has learned through her community-based mental health practice and research. She noted that it would only be when this time of scrutiny about what happened, with

its attendant media attention, was over that the community could come together and consider: “How are we going to do this together?”¹

This Report contains the results of the Commission’s independent investigations and examination of the mass casualty including through a minute-by-minute review of what happened on April 18 and 19, 2020, and a broader lens of causes, context, and circumstances leading up to and following all that happened. We find there were and are significant and extensive systemic inadequacies and failures in the Nova Scotian and Canadian public safety system, particularly with respect to planning and operationalizing the RCMP’s critical incident response but extending beyond it. Public safety depends upon the establishment of a system for public safety, one that ensures clear and consistent communication, co-operation and coordination between actors and agencies, between agencies and the public, as well as accountability at all levels of government and ultimately to the public. Such a collaborative system was not in place in April 2020, and this situation persists today.

A second central finding is that the perpetrator’s violent behaviour and other unlawful actions created significant warning signs and red flags, as well as opportunities for prevention and intervention over a number of years. This finding implicates the day-to-day operation of public safety, social services, and health services. It underscores the intrinsic connection between: everyday practices that promote community safety and well-being; and preventing violence by addressing its root causes, intervening in patterns of violent behaviour, and assuring the capacity to respond effectively to critical incidents, including those with the potential to lead to mass casualties. It also underscores the importance of ensuring recovery and supporting healing from violence and trauma so as to interrupt the cycles that reproduce further violence and trauma. This dynamic underscores the need for public health prevention approaches. This shift toward prevention and timely intervention in turn requires a significant rebalancing between community-engaged processes and strategies and policing and criminal justice responses.

No one can undo the perpetrator’s actions nor the actions taken by others in response: these actions are the epicentre of concentric circles of impact caused by the April 2020 mass casualty, along with its precursors and aftermath. The ripple effect of the mass casualty cannot be erased. Steps can be taken, however, to arrest its path from extending ever-outward and becoming more all-encompassing. Collectively, individuals, communities, the province of Nova Scotia, and Canada can

learn from this incident and work together toward enhanced safety and well-being in the future. An appreciation of the depth and breadth of this ripple effect is an essential component of effective, concerted, forward-looking efforts. The recommendations of this Commission can create a sea change that will absorb these ripples over time and usher in opportunities – marking a shift toward the future. It is time to turn the tide together.

At this juncture, therefore, we add a second image and dimension to our framework to complement the ripple image and mark a shift toward the future: turning the tide together. This tide metaphor also signifies the transition from the Commission to those charged with implementation: governmental institutions and agencies, community-based organizations, communities, and individuals both in their professional roles and as citizens. Our work ends with the completion of this Report, but more difficult work lies ahead. Although some reforms have been undertaken since the mass casualty, many of the lessons to be learned from the systemic failures have yet to be considered, much less acted upon. Given this circumstance, some of the recommendations in this Report require profound changes to institutions and to the ways agencies and communities work together to create an effective public safety system. The recommendations also encompass measures to encourage cultural shifts; measures that necessitate changes at the individual, relationship, community, and societal levels. In short, our recommendations call for a “whole of society” response and engagement.

Turning the tide is an expression used to describe a significant change in direction, including by going against an existing current or pattern within society. Turning the tide requires community, political, and institutional leaders to help shape a counter-current and the momentum to establish and support new patterns. The most powerful currents are created by many working together in community. It is our hope that this Report will harness the outrage and compassion needed to create a wellspring of commitment to and actioning of the substantive changes required to restore trust and enhance community safety and well-being. Turning away from the responsibility to see, feel, and act in response to the mass casualty and its antecedents is unimaginable. In light of the traumatic losses and continuing impact, facing the tide and turning it in a new direction is the only acceptable course. It is also our hope that our recommendations, many contributed by Participants and the public, assist in shaping this momentum to turn the tide on violence and our refusing to continue to accept the current circumscribed, reactive responses to it.

We chose the tide metaphor in part out of recognition of Cobequid Bay, an inlet of the Bay of Fundy. The bay's name is derived from the Acadian spelling of the Mi'kmaw word *We'kopekwitk*, the Mi'kmaw word for the area. The shores of Cobequid Bay are important to many people living in Colchester, Cumberland, and Hants counties, in Mi'kma'ki. The April 2020 mass casualty is the most fatal mass shooting in Canadian history, and it occurred in a series of rural communities beginning on Cobequid Bay's northern shore. Now is the time to act collectively to change the course of the tidal wave of violence that was set into motion many years ago, that reached a critical point on April 18 and 19, 2020, and that continues beyond this time and place. Turning the tide requires both a reckoning with this past and accepting responsibility to contribute to a safer future.

Everyone has a role to play individually and collectively to achieve this shared, communal goal. The first step is to stand against the tide: to resist coming to premature conclusions, or to rely on pre-existing judgments about the mass casualty and the response to it and, instead, to read this Report with an open mind. Ideally, this first act leads to more engagement: reflecting on the contents and recommendations and, crucially, talking about it with family, friends, and colleagues. After that many paths open up: with or against the tide, in the central stream of change or at its edges. These are decisions that we each will make and, as a result, each of us in our own way will be a part of the ultimate response to the mass casualty and its aftermath.

In the remainder of this Part, we provide some additional context for this Report and describe its contents. The next section describes the purpose of the Commission's work, established by the mandate given to us by the Governments of Canada and Nova Scotia, and the processes we developed and carried out independently of governments and other institutions to achieve this purpose. We then describe this Report. First we set out the analytical framework used to shape the information and evidence gathered and analyzed. Second we explain the structure of the Report and how it is organized. Third we provide brief overviews of the content of each of the seven volumes (including this one). We recognize that our Report is long; we have prepared an Executive Summary and the overview in this introductory volume and carefully designed the Report layout to be accessible for a wide range of readership.

CHAPTER 5

Commission Purpose and Process

CHAPTER 5 Commission Purpose and Process

Purpose

The Governments of Canada and Nova Scotia established the Inquiry by Joint Orders in Council issued on October 21, 2020 (see Volume 7 Appendices: Appendix A), in accordance with both federal and provincial public inquiry statutes.

What is a Public Inquiry?

A public inquiry is an official independent process uniquely designed to examine issues or events of great public importance and make recommendations for the future. In Canada, public inquiries can be created by federal, provincial, territorial, and municipal governments. Although public inquiries receive their mandates from the government, they operate independently from the government to maintain the integrity of the inquiry's process and recommendations.

Public inquiries have a wide range of tools and mechanisms to carry out their mandates, including the ability to design their own processes. Public inquiries are inquisitorial rather than adversarial in nature, and they cannot make findings that could be seen as conclusions of civil or criminal liability. As a result, public inquiries are not subject to the same procedural rules and strict evidence requirements as civil and criminal proceedings. This flexibility and openness to information and evidence allows public inquiries to investigate facts effectively, bring them to light, and call for accountability through recommendations in the public interest.

The Orders in Council required the Commission to accomplish three main functions in relation to the mass casualty of April 18 and 19, 2020, in Nova Scotia:

1. To inquire into what happened and make findings on:
 - i. the causes, context, and circumstances giving rise to the April 2020 mass casualty;
 - ii. the responses of police, including the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) and municipal police forces, the Canada Border Services Agency, the Criminal Intelligence Service Nova Scotia, the Canadian Firearms Program, and the Alert Ready Program; and
 - iii. the steps taken to inform, support, and engage those most affected.

2. To examine issues that contributed and were related to the causes, context, and circumstances giving rise to the mass casualty, including but not limited to the following:
 - i. contributing and contextual factors, including the role of gender-based and intimate partner violence;
 - ii. access to firearms;
 - iii. interactions with police, including any specific relationship between the perpetrator and the RCMP and between the perpetrator and social services, including mental health services, prior to the event and the outcomes of those interactions;
 - iv. police actions, including operational tactics, response, decision-making, and supervision;
 - v. communications with the public during and after the event, including the appropriate use of the public alerting system under the Alert Ready Program;
 - vi. communications between and within the RCMP, municipal police forces, the Canada Border Services Agency, the Criminal Intelligence Service Nova Scotia, the Canadian Firearms Program, and the Alert Ready Program;
 - vii. police policies, procedures, and training in respect of gender-based and intimate partner violence;
 - viii. police policies, procedures, and training in respect of active shooter incidents;

- ix. policies with respect to the disposal of police vehicles and any associated equipment, kit, and clothing;
- x. policies with respect to police response to reports of the possession of prohibited firearms, including communications between law enforcement agencies; and
- xi. information and support provided to the families of victims, affected citizens, police personnel, and the community.

3. To produce a report that:

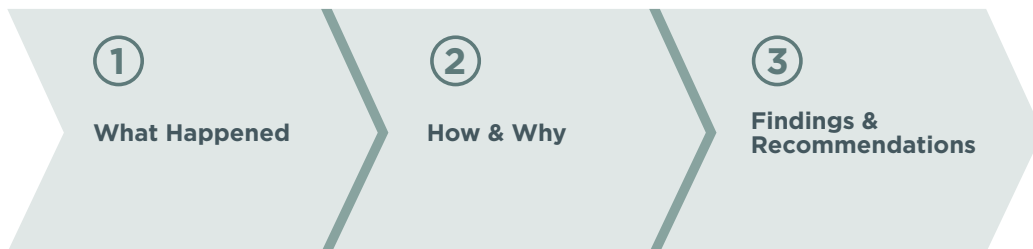
sets out lessons learned as well as recommendations that could help prevent and respond to similar incidents in the future.

Process

We developed a phased approach to our work that systematically matched the three functions assigned to us in our mandate:

- Phase 1: establishing the foundation (what happened);
- Phase 2: learning and understanding (how and why it happened); and
- Phase 3: shaping and sharing (the significance of what happened and how we must respond).

Phased Approach



In Phase 1, the Commission focused on ascertaining the facts, establishing what happened leading up to, during, and after the mass casualty. Building the core evidentiary foundation was necessary to meet the mandate but it was also intended, as a matter of priority, to answer the public's pressing questions about the mass casualty, given the dearth of accurate information publicly available.

In Phase 2, we examined the causes, context, and circumstances of the mass casualty in order to answer questions about how and why the mass casualty occurred and to understand the facts in the broader context. In this phase, we focused in particular on exploring issues set out in our Orders in Council, such as access to firearms, responses by the police and service providers, emergency communications, and gender-based and intimate partner violence.

In Phase 3, we looked forward and focused on what lessons could be learned and how best to make a difference in the future. As we formulated our recommendations, we consulted with those most affected, Participants, members of the public, and other diverse communities and groups and learned from the perspectives they shared with us.

In developing our overall design of the phases, we also developed thematic approaches to refining the many issues that arose from the mass casualty. We organized the Commission's work around three main themes or "pillars": policing, community, and violence. This thematic approach assisted us in connecting the dots among specific facts, incidents, issues, causes, context, circumstances, and consequences.

To establish the factual foundation, **our information-gathering work in Phase 1 relied on document production, our independent investigations, and witness interviews.** With our vast mandate and tight timelines, we used Foundational Documents to distill a mass of material into a navigable narrative. We presented the Foundational Documents as soon as we could in the Phase 1 public proceedings starting in late February 2022 in order to share what we knew about what had happened on April 18 and 19, 2020. An example of a Foundational Document can be found in Annex A: Sample Documents and on our website.

Over the course of our mandate, the Commission shared 31 Foundational Documents with the public. They contained evidence gathered through 109 document subpoenas, more than 250 witness interviews, and numerous site visits. The Commission presented these documents in chronological order following the timeline of the mass casualty. Where we or the Participants identified material gaps,

inaccuracies, or areas requiring further illumination in the Foundational Documents, we sought oral evidence from witnesses to assist us in addressing those aspects of the evidentiary foundation.

This approach allowed us to present thousands of documents relating to April 18 and 19, 2020, so the Participants and the public did not have to wait for the Final Report to learn what happened. We marked transcripts of witness interviews, investigative reports, legislative and policy briefs, and other materials as exhibits and filed affidavits to reduce the amount of public hearing time required. This approach also allowed us to call only those witnesses who were necessary to complete the evidentiary record and helped to reduce or prevent trauma for those who would otherwise have been called. In short, our approach enabled us to complete a thorough public record within the time allotted.

As required by the Orders in Council, this Inquiry incorporated a restorative approach in all of its processes. As described further in Volume 7, Process, this approach has been used in other commissions of inquiry. Restorative principles require a non-adversarial, inclusive, and collaborative approach. They oblige us to focus on facts and issues in context rather than in isolation, and on accountability and responsibility rather than liability or blame. This restorative approach underscored our goal of seeking the best information that would provide insight into what had happened and how and why it happened. A process that would seek to lay blame or create a public spectacle of someone is unlikely to produce that person's best evidence.

We assembled a robust evidentiary foundation on which to make our findings and recommendations through a variety of means, including dozens of Foundational Documents based on the review of many thousands of source materials obtained via subpoena, affidavits, investigations supplementary reports, more than 250 interviews, and the testimony of 60 witnesses (individuals, experts, and panels).

In addition, we established a Research Advisory Board, conducted an environmental scan of relevant past reports, and commissioned technical and expert reports on issues within our mandate. Some of the authors of commissioned reports appeared as witnesses, some participated in roundtables, and some of the reports were simply introduced at proceedings. In addition to the roundtables, we held presentations and small group sessions to contextualize and illuminate the evidentiary foundation.

Phase 3 of the Commission's work focused on the third branch of our mandate: to distill the lessons learned from the mass casualty and make recommendations to help ensure the safety of our communities in the future. In this final phase, the activities were designed both to solicit concrete proposals for recommendations and to foster dialogue in support of the implementation and change processes emanating from the Commission's Final Report.

For more detail about the Commission process and approach, Volume 7 provides a comprehensive record of the steps we took and the reasons behind them. Our vision throughout the Commission mandate was to provide clarity around the causes, context, and circumstances that led to the April 2020 mass casualty in Nova Scotia and to make meaningful recommendations to help make communities safer in the future.

CHAPTER 6

Our Approach

CHAPTER 6 Our Approach

As described in the last section, our mandate required us to examine in detail what happened on April 18 and 19, 2020, and the causes, context, and circumstances leading to and flowing from the mass casualty. We have accomplished these requirements fully and transparently, working with Participants and others to establish an extensive and accessible public record of what happened, as well as how and why it happened. Our final responsibility was to shape what we have learned into a Report that is comprehensible and reflects fairly the information received, gathered, and developed by the Commission. We have shared this knowledge in a way that clearly sets out main findings and lessons to be learned. Most importantly, we have done our utmost to encourage effective learning of these lessons so we may achieve our shared goals: enhanced community safety and well-being through prevention and intervention; and effective planning and preparation for critical incident response, while attending to recovery and resilience. Recommendations and guidance about implementation are the scaffolding between lessons identified and their integration into concrete actions that create change.

The mass casualty was a complex event resulting from the actions of one man, the perpetrator. Over 13 hours he murdered, destroyed, and wreaked havoc in 17 crime scenes in several communities. We estimate that over a thousand people were actively engaged in responding to his actions during this critical incident: family and community members, approximately five hundred to six hundred first responders and service providers, and other police and emergency response personnel. Many more have been involved in dealing with the aftermath of his deeds in the days, months, and years since.

Given this complexity, it is not feasible for this Report to meaningfully document every action, decision, and communication made in the course of the mass casualty. Nor can we delineate every aspect of the precursors to these events and their consequences. We have nonetheless worked to provide a comprehensive factual foundation that fully addresses the breadth and depth of the mandate.

Three focal points have guided us in establishing the appropriate level of detail. The first focus is on providing a clear narrative account of the events of April 18 and 19, 2020, including salient factors from before and after that period. Our second focus is to emphasize aspects of this account that give rise to lessons to be learned. The lessons we draw are directed as closely as possible to responding to the specific directions in the Orders in Council that establish our mandate. We summarize the key aspects of what we have learned in our main findings, which are set out in bolded text, and in conclusions drawn throughout the Report. Our third focal point is on information that establishes the basis for our recommendations and implementation guidance. **Our recommendations are outcome-based: we asked ourselves, what result will contribute to enhanced community safety and well-being? What changes are needed to get there? How can we foster individual and collective responsibility and collaboration needed for effective change?**

Four principles have guided us as we reviewed and analyzed the Commission record, established our narrative account, determined the central lessons to be learned, and developed our recommendations for the future. The first principle is that we need to do a thorough and detailed analysis of the mass casualty in order to move forward on the basis of shared responsibility for community safety and well-being. Second, we have emphasized learning over blame as a guiding principle. We also seek to avoid quick simplistic responses to complex questions. Instead, we embrace complexity and find ways to mobilize it within our recommendations and proposed implementation processes. Lastly, we have prioritized whole of society and systems change as the central, connecting features of the path forward from the mass casualty.

In our roundtable on prediction and prevention of mass casualty incidents, Mr. Robert Wright, acting executive director of the African Nova Scotian Justice Institute, warned us against solutions that are motivated solely by moral panic and outrage. In particular, he stressed that we should be particularly aware of exaggerated responses to and unplanned consequences of our recommendations, the burden of which would likely follow historical and continuing patterns of discrimination and fall most heavily on the people who are most marginalized. Many responses to critical events have had this unintended but not unpredictable impact. We have heeded this important message.

Looking Back in Order to Move Forward

Our narrative account is a comprehensive one and includes both facts that were known or knowable during the events and additional facts that could only have been ascertained after the events. The Commission has devoted considerable resources to assembling the extensive record of evidence and information required to ascertain what happened during the mass casualty. It has not been an easy task both because of the sprawling, multi-faceted nature of the incident and the voluminous, fragmented documentation of the response.

We recognize that it is easy to be wise in hindsight – particularly for us in our roles as Commissioners. We are looking back at these events from positions of safety and considering them without the intense pressure faced by those who were tasked with responding in the moment. We are charged with public responsibilities that carry serious weight and we are aware of the potential long-term implications of our decisions and actions. Unlike many of the people who responded to the mass casualty, however, we are not responsible for making immediate life and death decisions. As we look back, we have been steadfast in keeping the awareness of our position relative to those directly and indirectly engaged in the events of April 18 and 19 front and centre.

We acknowledge the problem of hindsight bias and have taken steps to avoid it in reviewing and analyzing the record and in reaching our conclusions. Hindsight bias can lead to people believing that an outcome was inevitable, or at least was much more predictable than people originally thought. This often involves people projecting newly gained knowledge onto their understanding of past events – without recognizing that their perception of past events has been coloured by information not available to those acting in the moment. Where “new knowledge” is pertinent to any conclusions made, we recognize and discuss its impact on our decision.

In addition to paying attention to the pitfalls of hindsight bias, we have been mindful in applying the more useful constructive idea of “back-sighting.” Back-sighting is a thorough and detailed analysis of past events in the service of foresight: looking back with the objective of finding lessons to carry forward. During our roundtable on the prediction and prevention of mass casualty incidents, Professor Nikolas Rose, former professor of sociology and the founding head of the

Department of Global Health and Social Medicine at King's College, London, provided his perspective on this approach:

And although I think prediction, foresight is difficult, I think back-sighting is actually quite useful and I think if you looked at each mass casualty event and you back-sighted it and you looked at all the points where decisions had to be made by individuals, by authorities and others and what might have happened differently at all those events without apportioning blame, a non-blame way of back-sighting, you might begin to find some common features within which you could intervene and common ways in which people who are involved either in the psychiatric services or in the police forces or elsewhere might be able to intervene.¹

Our mandate is to examine and assess past actions, decisions, and omissions with the objective of identifying, learning from, and correcting deficiencies. The result of our back-sighting of the mass casualty are the findings and conclusions contained in this Report.

Choosing Learning over Blame

In the face of great suffering, the desire to seek people and institutions to blame is understandable. It is a natural, human reaction but it does not assist in finding the path forward. Blame is not a powerful force for change, however; in fact, it tends to have the opposite effect.

The negative dynamic initiated by blame was emphasized by several Commission experts. During our roundtable on critical incident preparation, response, and decision-making, for example, Dr. Paul Taylor, assistant professor at the University of Colorado Denver School of Public Affairs, observed, “you can either have blame or you can learn. You can’t do both, you have to choose.”² Blame makes it more difficult to acknowledge and learn from mistakes. Focusing on lessons to be learned also facilitates the acknowledgement of responsibility, and accepting responsibility is a key step toward making positive changes. An emphasis on learning is consistent with our mandate.

Promoting shared responsibility is one of our main objectives, and a focus on culpability is antithetical to that objective. The aftermath of the mass casualty has been characterized by unseemly finger-pointing among policing agencies and other authorities. We seek to disrupt this dynamic.

Many respondents to our Share Your Experience survey also expressed the view that change would “not happen through pointing fingers” but through “honestly discussing the flaws and being open about and correcting them.”³ Finger-pointing and turf battles between police forces were seen as unhelpful. One respondent put it this way: “Don’t punish those who made difficult decisions to the best of their ability – use this to incite change and have a real protocol in order to prepare for future catastrophes.” Another said: “Unless the outcome of this Commission provides productive quality improvement opportunities for a variety of areas, and there is no finger pointing, blaming and shaming it will be a huge detriment to our community and those who [were] directly impacted (families and services).”⁴

Choosing learning over blame also acknowledges the extraordinary levels of guilt and shame experienced by many first responders. We examine the impact of the mass casualty on emergency responders in Volume 4, Community. Most individuals did the best they could in unprecedented circumstances, within their personal limits and circumstances outside their control (either caused by the perpetrator or systemic institutional failures). We have sought to avoid inflicting more psychological injury on those already suffering from the impact of the mass casualty, while at the same time inspiring proactive responsibility going forward. In any case, with only a few exceptions, our findings indicate systemic failures, inadequacies, and limitations.

Some individual conduct and actions during the mass casualty amounted to errors or shortcomings. Systems fail; individuals fall short.

We were fortunate to have the opportunity to learn about the wisdom of imperfection from Elder Marlene Companion when she described the eagle feather that she brought into the talking circle we participated in with representatives from Mi’kmaw communities:

Today, I chose my very first eagle feather that I was able to obtain through Natural Resources, and the officer that gave me this eagle said, “It’s not in very good shape.” And I said, “It’s perfect,” and he said, “Well, I don’t know what you’re going to do with it.” But it became a very valuable teaching tool for me, because it has a tail feather from a youngin ...

People say, “You’re an Elder; you should carry something more grand.” And I do: I carry my eagle fan. But today, I was called to bring this feather. And the teaching behind this feather is “not everything in this life is perfect.” No matter how hard we try to do absolutely perfect, it’s never absolutely perfect. And what people fail to realize is that they’ve done their best and they’ve said their best and they’ve shared their truths. And as people who have sat and walked and listened to the entire proceedings from start to finish, you’ve all done your best.⁵

Elder Companion’s story reinforced the value of extending compassion to individuals who have done their best.

Acknowledging the difficult situation faced by first responders as a result of the perpetrator’s actions does not mean accepting as reasonable the inadequacies and limitations in the critical incident response. His actions were unpredictable in a narrow sense, although there had been warning signs brought to the attention of police years before the incident. The missed intervention points are examples of systemic gaps, failures of a range of interacting authorities and policies. In addition, our public safety system is meant to be designed to effectively respond to hazards and emergencies, including active shooter situations. For example, training and practice, including by learning from what went wrong on April 18 and 19, 2020, can help first responders in the future. Similarly, a close scrutiny of institutional policies and practices and patterns of responses and decision-making can assist us to learn how to prevent similar incidents and to prepare for a more effective and timely response. Following up on his comments about back-sighting quoted above, Professor Rose predicted we would find that “[w]hat’s gone wrong is probably a consequence of a contingency of a whole series of multitudinous factors.”⁶ His prediction was correct.

Both public inquiry law and our Orders in Council preclude us from making findings of civil or criminal liability, and this requirement too is consistent with de-emphasizing blame. We are permitted to make findings of misconduct; however, making adverse comments or findings was not the principal focus of the Inquiry or this Report. To the extent that we made findings about what happened involving descriptions of the actions and decisions of individuals, our focus and findings were on how institutional, organizational, structural, and systemic factors shaped or were reflected in and through the conduct and actions of individuals. We are not blaming and we are not finding misconduct. However, we do not shy away from hard truths either. We identify them precisely so we can learn from them and do better.

Embracing and Mobilizing Complexity

Many commentators also sought a simple and conclusive answer to how and why the mass casualty happened. But like the Westray public inquiry before us, the story is “a complex mosaic of actions.”⁷ **The lessons to be learned from these events are wide-ranging, and this complexity is anticipated in our terms of reference. It is crucial that we avoid the tendency to look for quick responses and partial solutions, the “flurry of activity” with its emphasis on the appearance of doing something rather than the substance of effective action. The path to enhanced community safety and well-being is not fully definable from the outset. It requires holistic and collaborative processes in search of long-term solutions focused on the future that take into account local needs and the specific needs of differentially affected groups.**

In our Report, we traverse a range of matters, from specific operational aspects, to education and training; to institutional policies, procedures, and practices; to public sector systems designed to promote community safety and well-being; and to social norms and behaviour. Change is required at all these levels. We embrace this complexity and have sought to mobilize an equally multi-factored change process, the foremost feature of which is whole of society engagement, and through responsive and effective recommendations and implementation processes. The underlying foundation or common thread in our Report is the need to prioritize the systems change required by and for enhanced community safety and well-being.

Prioritizing Systems Change

People work within organizations and institutions that are part of a system, and both are a segment of and operate within societal structures. For example, an individual police officer works within a specific police service that is part of the municipal, provincial, or national system of policing. Even senior leaders are shaped by systems, and their decisions and actions can be limited by the legacy of earlier decisions and actions. The police officer, police leadership, the police agency, and

the system of policing all influence and are influenced by the social and economic structures of Canadian society. The same holds true for other organizations and institutions with roles and responsibilities in our system for community safety and well-being. These relationships are dynamic and interdependent.

Institutions intersect with human relationships in a variety of ways. One clear example of the interaction and dependencies between individuals, relationships, community, and society is the dynamics of gender-based, intimate partner, and family violence.

The Commission's work brings to light the many connections between extraordinary events like the mass casualty and forms of daily violence experienced by so many women, children, and others who are marginalized in our society because of economic, social, or other forms of disadvantage. Women living at the intersection of sexism and racism or other discrimination are at the greatest risk of all forms of violence. Our work also powerfully illuminates the ways in which our societal responses, including those by police, have systematically failed to address the roots and manifestations of gender-based, intimate partner, and family violence. These societal and police failures perpetuate the conditions in which violence thrives.

Acknowledging the clear connection between gender-based, intimate partner, and family violence and mass casualties is an essential first step toward making the long-term and permanent changes required to establish inclusive safety systems that provide equal protection and well-being to all community members.

The desired outcome of equal and inclusive community safety and well-being requires deep, fundamental changes that must affect the way the whole system functions through a whole of society response. Widespread societal response is dependent upon cultural change and in this instance it demands acknowledging, confronting, and preventing male violence and other unhealthy manifestations of masculinity, including in the ways our systems operate to control and punish women, and the ways in which most of us are unintentionally complicit in perpetuating this systematic oppression. This is not about demonizing men or viewing women as victims. It is about being honest with ourselves about how our society is structured and taking responsibility for our role in perpetuating oppressive systems.

We are embedded in a culture and we internalize the customs and social mores that define that culture; thus we each have a role in either perpetuating it or challenging it. Changing systems begins with individual and collective awareness of the unconscious biases, assumptions, and cultural norms that sustain our communal

way of life. But culture can change pretty quickly. Over the last few decades, we have seen it happen with drinking and driving, same-sex marriage, and drug laws. Sustaining system and culture change and contributing to its continued development requires brave leadership, political will, prioritization of energy and funding, and broad-reaching engagement.

Systemic change involves addressing the causes rather than the symptoms and working together to create a new normal. Less-dramatic shifts pave the way toward these deeper changes. Our recommendations and guidance for implementation set out both the deeper outcomes required for successfully reimagined community safety and well-being and specific recommendations for shorter-term steps that will enable the enduring transformative changes.

To feel safe is fundamental, yet for many people the mass casualty was a life-altering event that challenged their sense of safety in a deep-seated, elemental way. For many others, their lived reality was already precarious and insecure because of violence at the hands of intimate partners or family members, strangers, police, or other authorities. For Indigenous peoples and members of marginalized and oppressed communities, including African Nova Scotians, this insecurity has historical and, in some cases, intergenerational components. Violence prevention and intervention in the seemingly endless cycles of violence and trauma require systems change and cultural shifts to resist the normalization of these harmful patterns of behaviour.

Report Structure

Our Report consists of seven volumes. Volume 1, this volume, provides the framework for the Report as a whole. Volume 2 sets out our narrative account of the events of April 18 and 19, 2020, briefly touching on events leading up to the mass casualty and its immediate aftermath. Volume 2 contains our main findings about what happened and provides an initial assessment of how and why. In Volumes 3, 4, and 5, we revisit many of these main findings and conduct a fuller appraisal of them based on what we have ascertained about the causes, context, and circumstances of the mass casualty. Each of these volumes applies a different lens to the main findings: Volume 3 focuses on the theme of violence, Volume 4 examines the

mass casualty from the perspective of community, and Volume 5 concentrates on policing.

Most of the central issues within our mandate are addressed in more than one volume and together provide a robust understanding of what happened and how and why it happened, what lessons are to be drawn from it, and what recommendations are proposed for addressing the identified lessons. For example, in Volume 2 we set out the steps taken by the RCMP to warn and otherwise communicate with members of the public. In Volume 4, we look at public alerting systems in general and assess Alert Ready and make recommendations for the future. In Volume 5, we examine the RCMP policies that shaped their public communications and alerting strategy on April 18 and 19 and provide further explication of what hindered the development and implementation of a more effective strategy. We also make recommendations for improved police practices in this regard. This approach results in some duplication or overlap and we provide guidance to the reader explaining the connection between sections. Although overlap contributes to the length of the Report, we took this approach in order to minimize the inconvenience for readers of flipping back and forth to other sections or chapters to pick up the thread of continuity. It also contributes to our ability to understand and work with the complexity of some issues and processes, helping us to uncover the areas where systemic change is required.

Main findings, lessons learned, and recommendations are highlighted in the text of the Report and are listed in the Executive Summary.

Overview of Volumes

Volume 1: Context and Purpose

Volume 1 provides an introduction to this Report, commemorates the lives taken, and describes the communities most affected and the impact of the mass casualty. In addition to providing an overview of the Commission's purpose or mandate and process, it provides a brief description of the public safety system in Nova Scotia.

Volume 2: What Happened

Volume 2 provides a detailed account of what happened on April 18 and 19, 2020. This volume recounts the factual foundation established in Phase 1 of public proceedings, and presents the findings we can now make having reviewed the evidence accumulated through all three phases of our work. In addition to setting out how the mass casualty unfolded, this volume also identifies institutional and systemic failures, including missed opportunities to prevent the mass casualty as a whole and in some specific aspects.

Volume 3: Violence

Volume 3 includes a review of the perpetrator’s history, the intergenerational violence in his family, and the violence he inflicted on others throughout his adult life. This volume also addresses his access to firearms, police paraphernalia, and money. We describe the missed red flags based on what public sector agencies and the community knew about the perpetrator and his behaviour. We also review sociological and psychological insights into the perpetration of mass casualties and explain the clear and proven relationship between gender-based, intimate partner, and family violence, and mass casualties. These insights change how we understand and seek to prevent mass casualties. We consider efforts to counter these forms of violence and investigate why and how they have failed to keep women, children, and other dependants safe. We are at a critical juncture in Nova Scotia and Canada and must take swift and effective collective action. We identify four strategies: mobilizing a whole of society response; situating women’s experience at the centre; putting safety first; and taking accountability seriously. Putting safety first necessitates lifting women and girls out of poverty, decentering the criminal justice system, emphasizing primary prevention, timely intervention, and supporting healthy masculinity.

Volume 4: Community

In Volume 4, we focus on the role of community members as “first responders” and “first preventers” and on community-engaged practices for ensuring safety and

well-being. We examine the needs of those most affected, emergency responders, and the broader community during and after the mass casualty. We assess the extent to which these needs for information and support, including emergency communications and mental health services and other supports, were met and how best to meet them on an ongoing basis. We also examine how best to ensure community safety and well-being through community-engaged structures and processes, rethinking roles and responsibilities, and regulating access to firearms and police paraphernalia. We consider the particular context of rural communities and how to take this context into account in future to ensure everyone's safety and well-being. Finally, we build on our findings and recommendation in Volume 3 with respect to the role of unhealthy conceptions of masculinity in the perpetration of violence. We conclude that initiatives in support of cultivating healthy masculinity will contribute to one of the main cultural shifts required to end gender-based violence and are an important strand in a whole of society response.

Volume 5: Policing

Volume 5 begins with a discussion of best practices for critical incident response, identifying five key principles for police agencies to follow. We then turn to an evaluation of the emergency services response to the April 2020 mass casualty, which was led by the RCMP but also involved other agencies. This volume also discusses the continuing crisis after the mass casualty, considering evidence that we heard about how the RCMP, governments, and other agencies responded to the mass casualty and to public concerns about it. We then turn to some fundamental questions that are raised by our findings regarding the role of police in Canada's democracy, and we identify eight principles of democratic policing by which this role can be evaluated. We make recommendations to the RCMP about the changes needed to transform from its present paramilitary structure to a police service that better reflects contemporary Canadian legal norms and community expectations. We also consider the present structure of policing in Nova Scotia, making recommendations that are capable of ready implementation to improve accountability of police services in the province while also pointing the way to a community-wide conversation about the future of policing in Nova Scotia. The last part of this volume looks at how Canadian police services can better serve the public by attending to everyday practices.

Volume 6: Implementation – A Shared Responsibility to Act

Volume 6 focuses on how to implement the many recommendations we have made in this Report, ensuring that actions are taken and sustained to strengthen community safety and well-being. In this volume, we expand on the importance of collective responsibility, highlighting leaders, policy makers, institutions, organizations, groups, and individuals right across society. We explore past barriers to change and how these obstacles can be overcome. We share our recommendations on how to ensure there is accountability for the necessary actions required to respond to the April 2020 mass casualty in Nova Scotia. Finally, we propose next steps that people and groups can take to continue on the path toward safer communities, holding each other accountable while collaborating to drive action and change.

Volume 7: Process

Volume 7 describes the various processes involved in leading and designing the Mass Casualty Commission. This volume provides a comprehensive record of the steps we took and the reasons behind them. Understanding how we carried out our mandate provides a backdrop to the findings, lessons learned, and recommendations detailed in the other volumes. Our added purpose in setting out those steps and decisions in detail here is to provide assistance to future inquiries.

We explain the genesis of the Commission and the mandate it received from the Governments of Canada and Nova Scotia that defined its parameters. We also provide general information about the nature and role of public inquiries. We discuss the logistics of getting the Commission off the ground. We discuss the framework we developed to guide our public proceedings and how we put our design into action. We make some recommendations to assist in the set-up phase of future public inquiries and to ensure they have the necessary tools to fulfill their mandates. Finally, we reflect on our process and make a forward-looking invitation to readers to take up the Commission's recommendations and be part of the work ahead to secure our community and collective safety and well-being. The conclusion is followed by our acknowledgements of those who contributed to this work.

Volume 7: Process – Appendices and Annexes

The appendices include, among other documents, our Rules of Practice and Procedure, our decisions, and a detailed calendar of our public proceedings. We have also prepared three additional annexes. “Annex A: Sample Documents” contains samples and guiding documents we prepared in the course of our work. These annexed documents provide further insight into our processes that we hope will assist future inquiries. “Annex B: Reports” contains reports commissioned by us as well as reports prepared by our team. In addition to providing a wealth of knowledge and analysis within our commissioned reports, this annex includes important documents such as the environmental scan of 71 past Canadian reports and a record of what we learned through the Share Your Experience survey and community conversations. “Annex C: Exhibit List” contains the full list of materials marked as exhibits by the Commission.

**Part D:
Nova Scotia's Public
Safety System**

Introduction

Introduction

Public safety is not just about people being safe, but also their feeling safe. It is a perception grounded in freedom from harm and the consequences of crime and disorder in our homes, workplaces, and communities. It comes from the confidence that government and public safety agencies will respond effectively to emergencies, whether caused by acts of nature or human beings.

In this Part, we discuss the public safety organizations that respond to, assess, and take charge when events happen in our communities. We pay particular attention to some of the agencies that responded to the mass casualty and its aftermath.

We map out everyday public safety, as well as during the response to the mass casualty, for three purposes. First, this part is designed to introduce the agencies, their mandates, and the relationships among them to assist the reader in understanding our findings about what happened leading up to, during, and after the April 2020 mass casualty. Second, it lays a foundation for understanding that how the public safety system functions on a day-to-day basis is one factor that determines our collective ability to respond to critical incidents and other emergencies. Third, in this discussion, we introduce the principle that we have a public safety system that is more than its constituent parts.

CHAPTER 7

First Responders in Our Communities

CHAPTER 7 First Responders in Our Communities

When we think of public safety institutions, we tend to think of first responders. Emergency Health Services (EHS) personnel (paramedics and emergency medical technicians), police officers from municipal services and the RCMP, and career and volunteer firefighters naturally spring to mind. With separate but complementary mandates, these are some of the most visible public safety professionals in our communities. As we explain in this chapter, other professionals and institutions also contribute to our public safety system.

911 System

In an emergency, people access first responders by calling 911. People should call 911 when they or others experience a current or imminent serious threat to health, welfare, or property, and help is needed immediately. Non-emergency phone numbers supplement the 911 system for non-life-threatening situations, enabling people to report an incident or to connect with staff and programs. In some municipalities, access to non-urgent community-based health or social services can be obtained by calling 211, 311, or 811. These numbers divert calls from the 911 system, while still enabling access to first responders and agencies when assistance is required.

911 call-takers are the first point of contact when urgent help is requested by phone. They work behind the scenes, their purposeful yet steady voices triaging what is happening to determine which first responder(s) to dispatch, and to inform those responding about the circumstances they may face upon arriving at the scene. They provide words of comfort or instruction about what to do until help arrives. Call-takers are key to the effectiveness of the public safety system.

In Nova Scotia, 911 is administered by the Nova Scotia Emergency Management Office (EMO) under the Department of Municipal Affairs and Housing. Nova Scotia uses enhanced 911, called E911. EMO has agreements in place with several partner agencies known as public safety answering points (PSAPs) to provide 911 call-taking services. There are four PSAPs in Nova Scotia where 911 calls are answered and transferred to the appropriate emergency service agency dispatch, such as police, fire, and/or ambulance:

1. The Truro PSAP, which moved to Dartmouth, Nova Scotia, in February 2021, is operated by the RCMP as an Operational Communications Centre (OCC).
2. The Halifax PSAP is operated by the Halifax Regional Police – Integrated Emergency Services.
3. The Kentville PSAP is operated by Valley Communications.
4. The Sydney PSAP is operated by the Cape Breton Regional Police (CBRP).¹

911 calls are directed to the PSAP for the jurisdiction of the caller’s location. These jurisdictions were established based on the police responder for the area. Each PSAP has an assigned first-overflow, second-overflow, and third-overflow, where excess calls cascade to be answered, and a night-service PSAP.

Nova Scotia Department of Justice, RCMP, and Municipal Police Services

The protection of the general public depends on seemingly distinct first responder institutions and partner agencies working together in an interconnected network organized for the common good. Illustrating the mechanics of the public safety system means looking at groups of agencies that work together on a daily basis, agencies that plan for and respond to natural and human disasters, and agencies that assist those most impacted post-event. While it is beyond the scope of this Report to include every institution or agency, we start with a brief discussion of the structure of policing as one element within the public safety system.

In Canada, policing is both a provincial and federal responsibility with regulations at both levels of government providing for municipal, regional, and provincial

policing arrangements, and in some areas, options for First Nations communities. On a daily basis, police officers' duties, as outlined in many provincial police Acts, including that for Nova Scotia, can be described as follows: preventing crime, assisting victims, enforcing laws and responding to emergencies, and maintaining order – duties that safeguard everyday public safety and actions expected in emergent situations.

Nova Scotia Department of Justice

In Nova Scotia, the Department of Justice is responsible for the administration of justice, including policing. The website for the government of Nova Scotia describes how the Department of Justice approaches this obligation:

- sets policing standards, and ensures that policing services are delivered efficiently and effectively;
- provides regular audits, inspections and reviews for municipal police agencies to ensure improved policing standards are being met;
- manages contracts for the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and First Nations Policing;
- provides community-based crime prevention initiatives; and
- coordinates in-service training initiatives for police and public safety enforcement agencies.²

The minister of justice is also responsible for ensuring that independent police accountability mechanisms are in place, such as the Serious Incident Response Team and the Nova Scotia Police Review Board. Established standards set expectations for police service delivery and enable compliance monitoring through audits. Oversight mechanisms address allegations of wrongdoing. The two-pronged approach provides an important, albeit imperfect, foundation on which to build confidence in public safety outcomes under daily and exceptional circumstances.

In a canvass of Nova Scotia chiefs of police for the Structure of Policing report commissioned for this Inquiry, many chiefs reported that their services complied with the standards set by the Department of Justice. However, the Commission heard during interviews and in oral testimony that current standards are outdated and that work is ongoing to revise them. On July 27, 2022, Chief Superintendent

Christopher (Chris) Leather testified about the significance of provincial policing standards being updated:

C/Supt. CHRIS LEATHER: Well, once the standards are completed, they'll be published and adopted, and with those standards will be the accountabilities and expectations that go along with them in terms of our service delivery in our, meaning not just the RCMP, but all police services across the board.³

In her interview with Commission staff, Hayley Crichton, executive director of Nova Scotia's Department of Justice Public Safety and Security Division, discussed the state of provincial policing standards and their role in measuring compliance with policing obligations. She described how standards were being updated in conjunction with working groups that included police services, subject matter experts, and police oversight. She provided an update on this ongoing review during our roundtable on Contemporary Community Policing, Community Safety, and Well-Being.

Municipal Police Services

In Nova Scotia, the minister of justice is responsible for ensuring adequate and effective policing, and that police services meet the obligations outlined in the *Police Act*. While Nova Scotia's *Police Act* provides for both provincial and municipal policing services, the Act specifies that municipalities are responsible for policing within their boundaries and that they must maintain an adequate, efficient, and effective police department at their own expense. Municipalities have options to fulfill this obligation. They can establish a municipal police department or contract the use of another established police service, such as the RCMP, or adopt any other means approved by the minister of justice. In Nova Scotia, there are 10 municipal police departments governed by a municipal board of police commissioners as required by the *Police Act*: Amherst, Annapolis Royal, Bridgewater, Cape Breton Regional Municipality, Halifax Regional Municipality, Kentville, New Glasgow, Stellarton, Truro, and Westville. In these municipalities, the chief officer reports to the board on programs and strategies that reflect the department's priorities, goals, and objectives.

Some municipal police services do not have specialized investigative or operational services within their complements. Such expertise is often needed during an emergency. Examples include an Emergency Response Team (ERT), an Emergency Medical Response Team (EMRT), and Major Crime and Forensic investigators. In these cases, formal agreements, known as memoranda of understanding (MOU), and informal arrangements augment the municipal department and enable access to these specialized services for projects, emergencies, or other types of investigations. Memoranda of understanding are an example of how these agencies comply with policing standards and support their capability to address local crime and disorder issues or collaborate when larger emergencies threaten to overwhelm normal operations. In the text box, we provide brief descriptions of the specialized services engaged in response to the April 2020 mass casualty.

Specialized RCMP Services on April 18 and 19, 2020

Where circumstances warrant, RCMP command will mobilize its **Critical Incident Package** consisting of the Critical Incident Commander, the Emergency Response Team, the Emergency Medical Response Team, the Underwater Recovery Team, Critical Incident Scribes, the Crisis Negotiation Team, the Explosives Disposal Team, Police Dog Service, the Enforcement Support Unit, the Tactical Armoured Vehicle (and operator), and the Technological Support Unit.

The **Emergency Response Team** (ERT) is a specially trained tactical team. The team members use tactics and specialized weapons and equipment to resolve high-risk situations. Their duties include resolving armed and barricaded persons incidents, air and marine interventions, high-risk searches and arrests, and protective policing. The H Division Emergency Response Team is based out of RCMP H Division headquarters in Dartmouth, but part-time ERT members may be based in RCMP detachments outside the Halifax / Dartmouth area.

The **Emergency Medical Response Team** (EMRT) is a group of RCMP members trained and specializing in first aid, medical support, and other life-saving techniques. The EMRT “can be in an area that wouldn’t be safe to send civilians” and can provide “a level of advanced care ... to anyone who might be injured, whether that be [RCMP] members or ... the public.”⁴ They are part of the critical incident package. The Tactical Operations Manual (TOM) procedure on specialized support indicates that unless there are exigent circumstances, members of an EMRT will accompany an ERT when they are activated.

Forensic Investigations Services (FIS) is a unit made up of specially trained investigators who “detect, record, recover, and preserve evidence from a crime scene.” These specialists “will consider all available techniques, and direct a subject matter expert (SME), conferring with the file investigator when processing a crime scene for evidence.”⁵

Major Crime Investigators are specially trained investigators tasked with serious investigations that often involve crimes against persons with a higher level of complexity, risk, and resource requirements. Examples include “homicides, drug trafficking, and sexual assaults.”⁶ These investigations require the application of major case management methodology that “provides accountability, clear goals and objectives, planning, allocation of resources and control over the speed, flow and direction of the investigation.”⁷

Police Dog Service is a team comprised of a specially trained police officer and a police service dog. They must complete the required training (Basic Dog Handler Training (DHT)), and they assist operational and investigative members with apprehending offenders, as well as with searches for evidence (including explosives, cadavers, and controlled substances) and missing persons. They help to protect crime scenes and dignitaries. They also take part in community and crime prevention education programs.

RCMP

At present, the RCMP works at the federal (cybercrime, border integrity, and trans-national serious and organized crime operations), provincial, and municipal levels in Nova Scotia. The RCMP has been Nova Scotia’s provincial police service since 1932, with it being dubbed “H Division” the following year. Nova Scotia’s multi-layered legal framework for policing is found in its *Police Act* and the Provincial Police Service Agreement (Agreement) between the Canadian and Nova Scotian governments contracting the services of the RCMP. It is here that the complexity of Nova Scotia’s “blended” model of provincial and municipal policing originates, along with its cost-sharing structure.

Police Agencies in Nova Scotia



Map Data | commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Canada_Nova_Scotia_location_map.svg

Today, the Provincial Police Service Agreement or “contract policing”⁸ outlines provincial and municipal elements that raise both provincial and federal interests. The current Agreement between Nova Scotia and Canada was established in 2012, and this 20-year agreement expires in 2032. This arrangement is not unique to Nova Scotia; the RCMP is the provincial police force in all provinces except Ontario and Quebec. Of note is that the federal *Royal Canadian Mounted Police Act (RCMP Act)* applies in addition to the *Police Act* for contracted provincial

services from the RCMP. We explain how federal and provincial jurisdiction interact in Volume 5, Policing, Part C.

The RCMP operates out of 55 detachments and work locations across the province, including its headquarters and Operational Communications Centre located in Dartmouth, Nova Scotia.⁹ According to the RCMP's Multi-Year Financial Plan 2021/22 to 2023/24, H Division has a staffing complement of 987.5 (843.5 regular and civilian members, and 144 support staff).

Nova Scotia's minister of justice sets objectives, priorities, and goals for the RCMP as its provincial police service, and the commanding officer of H Division is responsible for daily operational decisions, implementing the objectives and priorities determined by the minister of justice. However, the commanding officer is also accountable to the RCMP commissioner in Ottawa (a federal appointee) and any delegates who are responsible for the control and management of the RCMP under the direction of the federal minister of public safety.¹⁰ Additions to, or deletions from, the duties and functions of the RCMP as the provincial police service (or exclusion or inclusion of certain functions within a geographic area) require consultation and agreement between the provincial minister of justice and the federal minister of public safety.

The federal government is responsible for equipping the RCMP to carry out its obligations under the Provincial Police Service Agreement. Selection and procurement of equipment is under federal control, although this is subject to consultation with the province. Recruitment of new RCMP members and cadet training are also done at the federal level.¹¹

C/Supt. Leather described the challenges of dual accountabilities in his testimony at the Commission:

It's a balancing act. It's – and it's challenging because we're often squeezed between the two. We are governed by our policies, of course, both divisionally and national policy. But yet our marching orders, if you will, come from the Province. They're the contracting partner. They describe what our priorities and objectives should be across all areas of policing except for federal policing. That direction comes from Ottawa directly. And therein lies some of the rub, but is also why it's so important that commanding officers and her team, and Criminal Operations, have to maintain constant contact and relations with the Province through the

Public Safety Division at Department of Justice because of the competing interests that we are trying to manage.¹²

When it comes to oversight, the federal government has exclusive authority to determine and apply professional standards and procedures for the RCMP. These matters are addressed under the *RCMP Act* and associated regulations. However, the Provincial Police Service Agreement makes provision for provincial input in relation to the RCMP commissioner's determination of professional standards and procedures. In Volume 5, Policing, we provide more information about municipal police services in Nova Scotia and their relationships with the RCMP.

Serious Incident Response Team

The Serious Incident Response Team (SiRT) exists as the civilian agency charged with independently investigating matters of significant public interest arising from the actions of any police officer in Nova Scotia. Deriving its authority from section 26A of the *Police Act*, the SiRT's stated mandate is "to investigate all matters that involve death, serious injury, sexual assault and domestic violence or other matters of significant public interest that may have arisen from the actions of any police officer in Nova Scotia." We return to the SiRT's jurisdiction and approach in Volume 5, Policing, Part B.¹³

Career and Volunteer Firefighters

In Nova Scotia, firefighters "carry out firefighting and fire prevention activities and help in other emergencies. They work for municipal, provincial, and federal governments and large industrial organizations that have internal firefighting services."¹⁴ In addition to fires happening in our communities, these situations can include responding to natural disasters, salvage operations, rescue, hazardous material and chemical spills, medical emergencies, and emergency management.

Nova Scotia's rural regions are served primarily by volunteer firefighters. Larger towns like Truro and municipalities like Halifax Regional Municipality and Cape

Breton Regional Municipality have a combination of career and volunteer firefighters serving their communities. The Nova Scotia *Volunteer Fire Services Act*, which was renamed the *Volunteer Fire and Ground Search and Rescue Services Act* in 2010, defines a volunteer firefighter as follows:

- (d) “volunteer firefighter” means an individual performing services for a volunteer fire department who does not receive in respect of those services
 - (i) compensation, other than reasonable reimbursement or allowance for expenses actually incurred, or
 - (ii) money or any other thing of value in lieu of compensation in excess of five hundred dollars per year or such other amount as prescribed by the regulations ...¹⁵

According to the website for the Fire Service Association of Nova Scotia, there are “more than 6,000 volunteer firefighters and 600 paid firefighters in Nova Scotia.”

While the everyday firefighters’ duties speak volumes about how career and volunteer firefighters protect the public, the response to the mass casualty highlighted the role and importance of volunteer fire brigades and their collaboration with other first responder agencies and partners. Specifically, Valley Communications contacted the Bass River and District Volunteer Fire Brigade at approximately 10:20 pm on April 18 about a fire on Orchard Beach Drive in Portapique. Volunteer firefighters stayed ready to respond until the RCMP declared it safe for them to enter the community. Further assistance was rendered when the RCMP’s command post was established at the Great Village and District Volunteer Fire Brigade hall, and a comfort centre set up at the Onslow Belmont Fire Brigade hall at the request of the Colchester Regional Emergency Management Organization (REMO).

Emergency Health Services

In Nova Scotia, Emergency Health Services (EHS) are provided by Emergency Medical Care, contracted by and responsible to the Nova Scotia Department of Health and Wellness. EHS’s communications centre is located in Dartmouth, Nova

Scotia, where it dispatches ground ambulances, a LifeFlight helicopter, and fixed-wing aircraft to persons in need. Crews consist of two paramedics per vehicle, who are located across the province based on historical call volumes. According to the EHS website, there are over one thousand paramedics registered in the province. EHS is also responsible for transporting patients between hospitals and medical facilities. According to its website, EHS “paramedics also work in Collaborative Emergency Centres across the province; provide health care in nursing homes in the Halifax Regional Municipality; and take on a leadership role in their community. EHS paramedics are a vital part of the health care system [in Nova Scotia].”¹⁶

EHS personnel proved vital to the response to the mass casualty, particularly in Portapique on April 18, 2020. Paramedics attended the community in the early hours of the mass casualty. They worked with police to assess several persons' injuries before transporting them to the hospital for further medical treatment. On April 19, EHS paramedics attended several scenes to render assistance, unaware of the risk posed by the perpetrator in the community.

CHAPTER 8

Other Public Safety Partners

CHAPTER 8 Other Public Safety Partners

With highly visible staff and vehicles, police services, fire services, and Emergency Health Services (EHS) are some of the most noticeable first responders in our communities. Other public safety partners are a less obvious presence, but without them the safety and well-being of our communities would suffer. These partners play key roles before an event occurs – collaborating in the pre-planning and design of operational integration, as well as delivering services in the aftermath to assist communities and promote recovery. In addition to the various agencies that are part of the formal public safety sector, there are also many community-based agencies and service providers that are important, necessary, and often-overlooked public safety partners. Although not an exhaustive list, the following are critical to every-day public safety, as well as during a mass casualty response.

Nova Scotia Emergency Management Office

One such agency critical to public safety is the Nova Scotia Emergency Management Office (EMO), a division of the Department of Municipal Affairs and Housing. EMO is tasked with emergency planning and coordination of emergency responses in Nova Scotia, including the administration of the provincial 911 service.

In an interview with the Commission, Paul Mason, executive director of EMO and the Office of the Fire Marshal, was asked about collaboration with police services. He advised that EMO works with police services through the 911 system, when Ground Search and Rescue teams are needed for police-led missing persons

searches and when police request a coordination [comfort] centre. Mr. Mason further elaborated on how EMO would work with police for incidents stemming from criminality, such as an active shooter or a terrorist attack against critical infrastructure. He advised how the response would be police-led with EMO taking over once the incident was under control:

Basically, once the immediate law enforcement issue has been dealt with and now it's a matter of kind of managing the – you know, just emergency management from incident to response to recovery. And then we would get involved because there would be a host of provincial departments and potentially federally as well that would be involved. And the province would kind of lead that. We would be in the – depending on what happened, we may be in a lead or we may be in a joint command type situation. And that's where we would add most value, for lack of a better term.¹

He described EMO's collaboration with municipalities as follows:

But you know, generally beyond that it's really providing, you know, training expertise, exercise expertise, and really kind of coaching them in day to day kind of operations for lack of a better term. When events occur, basically under section 10(a) of the Emergency Management Act they're required to report an emergency in, and they can request our assistance. And this is where that kind of tiered approach to emergencies come in. So the vast majority of emergencies are handled at the municipal level. They control the fire, police, and you know, ambulance assets per se basically but there will be cases where they will need to reach back to us, generally like hurricanes, large winter storms, critical infrastructure failures, those types of things.²

Victim Services in Nova Scotia

Provincial Victim Services

In the aftermath of an emergency, individuals, families, and communities can access crisis response and intervention services from several sources. When tragedies happen, particularly those stemming from a criminal act, the Nova Scotia Department of Justice Victim Services is a community care partner. On a daily basis, Victim Services offers a range of assistance by providing information, counselling, referrals to other services, and assistance navigating the legal system to help the victims of crimes. People can call Victim Services to learn about what it offers, or they hear about it from police or other agencies.

According to a report prepared by Victim Services for the Commission, Victim Services did not have a policy for mass casualty response, and this mass casualty went beyond any previous experience. Nevertheless, Victim Services still managed to set up sites in Portapique, Wentworth, Debert, and Shubenacadie, providing in-person support and system navigation despite it being the early days of COVID. These sites were active from May 5, 2020, to January 8, 2021. This response came at the behest of then minister of justice Mark Furey, and with assistance from other Justice departments and Health and Community Services.

Victim Services – Halifax Regional Police and the RCMP

The provincial Victim Services is not the only source for victim assistance, nor is it the only provider named Victim Services. The Halifax Regional Police established its own Victim Services Unit, separate from the provincial service, when it hired Verona Singer in 1996 based on the requirements of the Framework for Action on Family Violence:

So that unit was created as part of the legislative framework that came in to the Province of Nova Scotia in 1996 called The Framework for Action on Family Violence ... The framework also said that any police department with 60-plus officers should or must set up either a police officer who does victims services or a victim service unit. There was great confusion

between us and between the Department of Justice Victim Services. And at one point it was suggested that we change our name to something else because people were confused and probably still are confused. I see it as just a simple handoff. We do the front end work and then hand it off to the DOJ to do the court pieces. So that was our purpose.³

According to its website, the Halifax Regional Police “offers support services to victims of crime, and in particular to victims of domestic violence, sexualized violence, and serious crimes” through its Victim Services Unit. This unit is “comprised of civilian employees and volunteers who work with police officers” supporting victims in need.⁴

The RCMP’s commitment to victim services is embodied in units at the national and provincial levels. The Commission heard from Michelle Seaman, lead for the Victims of Crime Section for the RCMP at the National Headquarters in Ottawa, and Julia Rustad, the program manager for RCMP Victim Services in Nova Scotia. Ms. Seaman explained that the Victims of Crime Section

began in 2019, building upon lessons learned through our work with the Family Information Liaison Units that were established to support family members during the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls National Inquiry ... We at the National Headquarters work in collaboration and cooperation with our partners in divisions.⁵

Ms. Seaman further explained that her unit was mandated to support the front-line members in their work with victims through the development of policy, training, and resources. She described how the RCMP examines local successes to improve national approaches, ensuring the flexibility required by geographical and cultural differences in communities across the country. She further advised how her section worked with the Federal / Provincial / Territorial Working Group for Victims of Crime. Note, the RCMP has a national policy that defines a victim services organization and provides direction to members about victim services referrals.

Other Community-Based Services

In addition to the various agencies that are part of the formal public safety sector, there are also many community-based agencies and service providers, like shelters

and transition houses – public safety partners that are important, necessary, and often overlooked or taken for granted. Mental health service providers; faith-based institutions; the Canadian Red Cross; port authorities; rural district, town, and municipal councils; regional or municipal emergency management offices are other such service agencies. We discuss the crucial role played by many of these agencies in more detail in Volume 3, Violence, and Volume 4, Community.

Canada Border Services Agency

We live in a time when all parts of the world are more interconnected through trade, travel, and technology. International incidents can raise domestic concerns, and vice versa, highlighting the important public safety work being done by the Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA), a federal government agency under Public Safety Canada. On a daily basis, CBSA is responsible for integrated border services that support national security and public safety priorities, facilitating the free flow of persons and goods. In her interview with the Commission, Aiesha Zafar, director general for CBSA Intelligence and Investigations, described this mandate:

The CBSA has seven different branches, three of which are operational ... And then the three main operational branches are the travelers branch, so, they're responsible for all things travelers or passengers. We have commercial and trade branch, which again is responsible for commercial and trade, all commercial goods coming into the country, as well as ... the trade aspect and the tariffs. And then finally, intelligence and investigations where my position resides. So, it would be all of the intelligence program, investigations, immigration enforcement and policies and programs, response ... under that purview. There are seven regions then within the CBSA, so, seven regions across Canada; each region has their own structure, most are pretty similar.⁶

In a Commission interview, David Andow, CBSA's chief of operations described CBSA operations in Atlantic Canada as follows:

Sure. There's ... the Atlantic region, that's the overall ... that's our region, which encompasses the four provinces in the Atlantic region. It's all under one umbrella. So, ... there'd be an operational section, there's programs, there's intel and investigations, but we're all under one umbrella ... from the regional perspective. As far as operations go, there's marine, land and air. There'd be land has all the ports of entry on the land border, and there's some that arrive at marine. We have marine operations in various locations in the Atlantic region and of course, we have air at several airports in Atlantic region as well.⁷

The illegal smuggling of firearms across the Canada–United States border at New Brunswick, which is further outlined in Volume 3, *Violence*, highlighted CBSA's role in Canada's Public Safety Portfolio – a portfolio that requires collaboration across governments. CBSA is an active member in Criminal Intelligence Service Nova Scotia with its 2019 Memorandum of Understanding with the RCMP for the placement of a CBSA intelligence analyst into a position with Criminal Intelligence Service Nova Scotia (CISNS). When asked about the intelligence process across Canada, Ms. Zafar described the following:

So, when it comes to intelligence, again, we derive our ability to collect and produce intelligence based on our mandate at the border. There's various different ways that we could do it. We have partnerships with police services, with you know, international organizations who are also in the border domain, and we may receive intelligence or information from them that then we can use and analyze and put into the Canadian border context ... So, that's more at a like a strategic level, a higher level. At a very tactical level, we may receive specific intelligence or information from police services on individuals or organizations or goods that may be coming into the country that have a broader context that we would then look at, put our own lens on it, and turn into intelligence suited for the CBSA. Or, we have border services officers who are out there every single day who understand what happens at the border and information that they share with our intelligence analysts and officers or put into our system is then again analyzed and can be turned into intelligence. So, again, an important distinction is that intelligence is only intelligence once we do something to information that we've received. So, there's bits of information being collected from everywhere, and then we have

intelligence analysts who will look at that information and come to some sort of conclusion to help our decision makers.⁸

Criminal Intelligence Service Nova Scotia

For public safety partners with a law enforcement mandate, intelligence is important to support local crime and disorder suppression. Harm reduction is enhanced when there is a clearer picture of criminal activity in our communities. This clearer picture often comes from police services and other law enforcement partners, as well as citizens who live in the community and observe criminal activity.

Criminal Intelligence Service Nova Scotia (CISNS) is the Nova Scotia provincial bureau of Criminal Intelligence Service Canada (CISC). Its mandate is to “use the intelligence process to support law enforcement efforts to detect, reduce, disrupt, and prevent organized and serious crime in Nova Scotia.”⁹ CISNS ensures information is shared with its member agencies and CISC through the national database for criminal intelligence (Automated Criminal Intelligence Information System (ACIIS)). CISNS field offices are located across the province, and jointly staffed with RCMP members and municipal police officers from Bridgewater Police Service, Cape Breton Regional Police Service, New Glasgow Regional Police Service, Truro Police Service, and Kentville Police Service. In 2011, the CISNS submission guidelines divided the bulletins into three types: “officer safety (including weapons), intelligence, and crime bulletins.”¹⁰

The role of CISNS and intelligence sharing surfaced after the mass casualty with the discovery of a 2011 CISNS bulletin regarding officer safety. This bulletin, titled “Firearms Possession,” noted that the perpetrator stated “he wants to kill a cop.” The bulletin further warned that the perpetrator was in possession of “at least one handgun.”¹¹ We discuss the import of this bulletin in Volume 3, Violence, and explain in Volume 5, Policing, how, after the April 2020 mass casualty, it became a source of strained relations between the RCMP and municipal police agencies.

CHAPTER 9

Forging a Public Safety System

CHAPTER 9 Forging a Public Safety System

Systems are in the eye of the beholder – all around us and evident when we pause to look. Public safety is no different, and reflection reveals that it is a system forged in shared responsibility among governments, community service agencies, professional and volunteer first responder organizations, communities, and individuals alike; further shaped by laws and public policy; and influenced by our daily choices and actions.

So far, this Part has highlighted some of the important institutions that contribute to safety in our communities – every day and in the face of imminent threats. We will now turn our attention to how these institutions exist within and make up a system of public safety – and what it takes for these largely independent components to come together in service to Canadians.

How Systems Work Well

Systems theory talks about the role of reinforcing loops in a system's life cycle. A reinforcing loop is characterized by actions that promote more of the same reactions, which can either strengthen or weaken the system through virtuous or vicious cycles. When a system works well, it creates value in excess of its individual elements. This synergy doesn't just happen – rather each component must coexist and collaborate, contributing to overall welfare. Failure to do so risks not only the effectiveness of the system, but its very survival.

If we are to accept that public safety is a system, as described in this chapter, we must ask ourselves what is needed for this system to continue to keep us

safe – every day and during an emergency. What are the reinforcing loops that support or interfere with the teaming of emergency services?

In his report commissioned for this Inquiry, Dr. Curt Taylor Griffiths of the School of Criminology at Simon Fraser University discusses the human and organizational factors with potential to interfere with effective public safety response. Dr. Griffiths also discusses strategies to overcome these potential barriers. While Dr. Griffiths's report is focused on crises, this chapter with its system perspective posits that the forces described by Dr. Griffiths are present during everyday efforts to keep us safe. Ultimately, system effectiveness is not spontaneous; rather, it must be continuously nurtured through the following reinforcing loops:

1. effective mechanisms that support co-operation, collaboration, and communication at the leadership level;
2. joint planning and training involving both senior executives and first responders / other service providers; and
3. shared tools to support co-operation, collaboration, and communication, such as interoperable communication and data systems.

In the police context, the word interoperability is often used to describe how different services and agencies operate in conjunction with one another, including being able to connect and communicate through compatible equipment. We provide a brief introduction to these aspects of the Nova Scotia public safety system here and discuss them in greater detail in Volume 5, Policing.

Mechanisms for Co-operation, Collaboration, and Communication

A system will be effective when the mechanisms that support co-operation, collaboration, and communication at the leadership level work well.

In his expert report, Dr. Griffiths offers the following description of an effective interoperable system:

What you want to achieve is a “network culture.” That is to say, all players have to understand why they are in the network, where they fit in the

network, what their contribution is, and how important their contribution is ... in order to give meaning to their activities.¹

Dr. Griffiths explains that “features of an organization’s culture can either facilitate or hinder collaboration, and cultural interoperability among agencies can therefore be as important as technical and information-based interoperability.”²

When events threaten the public, responders naturally encounter unknowns, having to work through them in real time. Since many first responder agencies employ an organizational hierarchy, their leaders have the ability to remove barriers that can silo or frustrate an effective response. However, to do this, leaders must be engaged by those actively managing the response. In turn, everyone must continually look up, down, and across their organizations and toward other agencies for capabilities that might be needed. Similarly, once informed, senior leaders must remain active and accessible until the situation is resolved. In Part A of Volume 5, Policing, we explain how police and other agencies can prepare together in advance of a critical incident so that they work well together under stress and uncertainty. We identify interoperability as one of five key principles of effective critical incident response.

Joint Planning and Training

A second key component of the effectiveness of a public safety system is practices such as joint planning and training involving both senior executives and first responders / other service providers.

The nature and duration of an incident will determine the response, including which agency will lead. However, keeping communities safe requires the entire hierarchy within first responder and partner agencies. While daily operations allow police, firefighters, and paramedics to refine their joint operations, working in proximity or responding to the same incident does not guarantee a successful outcome. And, when it comes to the potential for critical incidents to overwhelm the normal operations of public safety specialists, seamless collaboration between everyone involved is that much more important. Proficiency requires practice; it requires simulating the conditions that time pressure and ambiguity create during critical incidents or when unfamiliar agencies come together for a common purpose.

The teamwork and collaboration required for multi-agency involvement suggest in-person planning and training as most practical for these outcomes. This format facilitates better experiential learning and problem solving, allowing for candid, real-time discussion about what is needed to enhance collaboration or remove barriers from differing viewpoints. **Roles, responsibilities, and actions need to be thought out and rehearsed in advance, employing “grim storytelling”³ to the extent possible; effective response cannot be left to chance during a crisis.** All inclusive joint exercises, such as planning and training, are one way to prepare responders from various agencies for the various roles they play in safeguarding the public. When done well, these exercises connect everyone from decision-makers to doers and encourage the development of personal networks that open co-operative channels outside the planning / training process.

From interviews conducted by the Commission, it is apparent that improvements could be made in training to support interoperability. When asked about possible recommendations that the Commission could consider, Robert Walsh, chief of the Cape Breton Regional Police Service and current president of the Nova Scotia Chiefs of Police Association, mentioned standardized training, and pondered whether the Department of Justice could play a role:

And finally, interoperability. I think standardizing training and resources is key. But again, that’s going to depend on funding. And as you understand, municipal forces are ... well, policing is a municipal responsibility, but what role could the Province play in this?⁴

We discuss interoperability more extensively in Part A of Volume 5, Policing.

Shared Tools

A third aspect of system effectiveness is shared tools to support co-operation, collaboration, and communication, such as interoperable communication and data systems.

During the May 12, 2022, public proceedings, Cheryl McNeil, one of the authors of the Communications, Interoperability and Alert Ready System report by Lansdowne Technologies, provided an explanation of interoperability:

I like to think of it more as an outcome of a state, and it's essentially getting the right information to the right people at the right time. There is a process for it. We saw the five lanes of interoperability which provides a model of how to achieve that state of interoperability. But the very base of it, in my mind, is the beginning – starting that relationship and that, communicating with all the stakeholders with respect to a particular issue that needs that interoperability, that collaboration, that cooperation; the communication.⁵

We explain the five lanes of interoperability to which Ms. McNeil refers in this quote, in Part A of Volume 5, Policing. When functioning correctly, this third reinforcing loop should address the observations and improvements identified through leader involvement and joint planning and training exercises. Through these processes, public safety personnel will have the opportunity to test drive logistics like deployment, standard operating procedures, equipment compatibility, data sharing, and communications, to name a few. Solutions to interoperability obstacles can be identified and solutions developed.

For example, “Nova Scotia has been a participant in the interoperability initiatives organized by Public Safety Canada and was one of the first provinces to have a province-wide trunked mobile radio (TMR) system in place for all public safety organizations using the 700mhz bandwidth.” This capability has

eight provincial mutual aid channels available to all radio users (police, fire, emergency health services [EHS], Valley Communications, which dispatches for nearly all of the volunteer fire services in the province, as well as servicing as a 911 Public Safety Answering Point [PSAP], search-and-rescue [SAR] volunteers, the military, border services, hospitals, etc.) to facilitate collaboration and coordinated responses to significant events ... This work on coordinated radio systems has progressed to include Prince Edward Island (which uses the Nova Scotia system) and New Brunswick, which has now implemented TMR2.⁶

The TMR2 radio system is an example that enhances interoperability when it is used to its full potential.

Conclusion

Conclusion

On a daily basis, a systems approach to public safety is required to serve Canadians in need, one that consists of a network of first responders and their partner agencies, many of which were described in this chapter. Their effectiveness and interoperability are dependent on collaboration, co-operation, and communication reinforced through active, engaged leadership, and joint planning and training exercises. When these parts come together, these agencies not only address the immediate threat to our safety, but also promote the recovery of those affected.

In Part D, we have focused mainly on the agencies and institutions that are part of the formal public safety system in Nova Scotia. We acknowledge that community members and civil society organizations make important contributions to public safety both every day and during critical incidents and other emergencies. Volume 4, Community, highlights the vital role of community members as first responders and first preventers. Volume 3, Violence, and Volume 4 emphasize the crucial role played by community service providers such as transition houses, sexual assault centres, and community mobilization teams in securing community safety for everyone.

Notes

PART B: THE RIPPLE EFFECT OF THE MASS CASUALTY

CHAPTER 1

The Individuals and Families Most Affected

1. Mass Casualty Commission, Transcript of Small Group Session with Darcy Dobson and Katie Devine: COMM0065233 at p 2 lines 3 and 4.
2. Mass Casualty Commission, Transcript of Recorded Interview of Mallory Colpitts: COMM0061175 at p 23.

CHAPTER 2

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3. Sipekne'katik First Nation, "History" (2016), online: <https://sipeknekatik.ca/history/>.
4. Millbrook Band Administration, "Millbrook First Nation" (n.d.), online: *Millbrook First Nation* <https://www.millbrookband.com/about>.
5. Sipekne'katik First Nation, "History" (2016), online: <https://sipeknekatik.ca/history/>.
6. Ibid.

PART C: PURPOSE AND APPROACH

CHAPTER 4

Turning the Tide

1. Mass Casualty Commission, Transcript of Proceedings, June 28, 2022: COMM0059926 at p35.

CHAPTER 6

Our Approach

1. Mass Casualty Commission, Transcript of Proceedings, July 14, 2022: COMM0059922 at pp 45-46.
2. Mass Casualty Commission, Transcript of Proceedings, June 1, 2022: COMM0058945 at p 127.
3. Share Your Experience Report, Annex B at p 104.
4. Ibid at p 105.
5. Mass Casualty Commission, Transcript of Proceedings, September 13, 2022: COMM0064771 at p 6.
6. Mass Casualty Commission, Transcript of Proceedings, July 14, 2022: COMM0059922 at p 35.
7. Nova Scotia, *Report of the Westray Mine Public Inquiry* (Halifax, November 1997), online: www.novascotia.ca/lae/pubs/westray/execsumm.asp.

PART D: NOVA SCOTIA'S PUBLIC SAFETY SYSTEM

CHAPTER 7

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3. Mass Casualty Commission, Transcript of Public Proceedings, July 27, 2022: COMM0061294 at pp 97 lines 27–28 and 98 lines 1–2.
4. Mass Casualty Commission interview of Cst. Jeffrey Mahar: COMM0055684 at p 2.
5. RCMP, Integrated Forensic Identification Manual, “ch. 2.4 Crime Scene Processing” (January 16, 2019) s 1.1 to 1.3: COMM0058882 at p 7.
6. RCMP, “Programs and services” (June 17, 2021), online: <https://www.rcmp-grc.gc.ca/en/ns/programs-and-services>.
7. RCMP, *Operational Manual*, “ch. 25.3. Major Case Management” (December 28, 2011), ss 1.1, 1.2, and 1.3 at p 317: COMM0058879.
8. RCMP, “2012 RCMP Provincial and Territorial Police Service Agreements Companion Document” (November 27, 2014) at p 9, online: <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/law-crime-and-justice/criminal-justice/police/publications/agreements/provincial-territorial-companion-doc.pdf>.
9. RCMP, Find a detachment - Nova Scotia, online: <https://www.rcmp-grc.gc.ca/detach/en/find/NS>; Nova Scotia, Directory of Police Agencies in Nova Scotia, online: https://novascotia.ca/just/policing_services/agencies.asp.
10. *Royal Canadian Mounted Police Act*, RSC, 1985, c R-10, s 5; See also: *RCMP Act*, *ibid.* s 20.2 setting out certain powers of the Commissioner including *inter alia* determining training, providing awards, discharging or demoting members, and establishing procedures to investigate and resolve complaints relating to harassment by a member. The Commissioner also has certain rule-making powers set out in section 21(2) of the *RCMP Act* including *inter alia* rules “respecting the performance by members of their duties,” conduct, and “the organization, efficiency or administration of good government of the Force.” See also *RCMP Act*, *ibid.* s 21(1), setting out the federal Governor in Council’s powers to make regulations respecting *inter alia* the organization, conduct, performance duties, discipline, efficiency, administration, and good government of the RCMP.
11. Our understanding is that RCMP Cadets are trained in a 26-week program during which they live at Depot (the RCMP Training Academy) in Regina, Saskatchewan. See: RCMP, “Cadet Training” (January 26, 2023), online: <https://www.rcmp-grc.gc.ca/en/cadet-training>.
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CHAPTER 9

Forging a Public Safety System

1. Commissioned report prepared by Curt Taylor Griffiths, “Interagency Communication, Collaboration, and Interoperability within Police Services and between Police Services and Other Emergency Services” (May 2022): COMM0058936, in Annex B at p 13 quoting C. Whelan, “Managing Dynamic Security Networks: Toward the Strategic Managing of Cooperation, Coordination and Collaboration” (2016) 30(1) *Security Journal* 310–27 at p 320.
2. Commissioned report prepared by Curt Taylor Griffiths, “Interagency Communication, Collaboration, and Interoperability within Police Services and between Police Services and Other Emergency Services” (May 2022): COMM0058936, in Annex B at p 13.
3. Commissioned report prepared by Laurence Alison and Neil Shortland, “Critical Incident Decision Making: Challenges of Managing Unique and High-Consequence Events” (May 2022): COMM0057772 at pp 12, 13.
4. Mass Casualty Commission, Transcript of Recorded Interview of Robert Walsh: COMM0064904 at p 25.
5. Mass Casualty Commission, Transcript of Proceedings, (May 12, 2022): COMM00058599 at p 8 lines 1–7.
6. Commissioned report prepared by C.T. Griffiths, “Interagency Communication, Collaboration, and Interoperability within Police Services and between Police Services and Other Emergency Services” (May 2022): COMM0058936 at pp 9–10.