

Provincial Partnership Committee on Missing Persons Family Meetings – October 14 & 16, 2009

Background

The Provincial Partnership Committee on Missing Persons (PPCMP) was formed in late 2005 and had its inaugural meeting in January of 2006. The PPCMP issued a Final Report in October of 2007 which contained 20 areas of recommendation to improve the overall response to missing persons' situations. The Committee invited families involved in cases of long term missing persons from 1990 onward to share information, identify key issues, and make suggestions for improving the process of responding to missing person cases at three meetings held in February and March of 2007. Many of the recommendations contained in the Final Report were influenced by opinions and concerns raised by family members at these meetings. Invitations for the 2007 family meetings were sent to 47 families and 53 persons representing 21 families participated.

Purpose of October 2009 Meetings

Since the release of the Final Report in 2007 the PPCMP has been working on implementing the 20 areas of recommendation contained therein. The purpose of the family meetings on October 14 and 16 of 2009 was: to update families on what progress has been made on implementing the recommendations of the Final Report, and to receive further input and direction from the families both on positive steps that have been taken as well as further steps that need to be taken.

The meetings were held in Regina on October 14 and in Saskatoon on October 16. A total of 24 family members representing 14 families participated. The following provides an overall summary of the main points raised at both meetings.

Main Themes

a) Update on Recommendations

A brief overview and update was given on all of the recommendations within the Final Report of the PPCMP and what action had been taken in response to the recommendation (see Appendix A for further description). Participants were invited to comment on any of these areas, but views were sought, in particular, about a number of recommendations that have particular relevance for families. They were:

- **Recommendation 1: Supports need to be developed by the PPCMP or other partner organizations to help families deal with a missing person situation.**
 - *Missing Persons Checklist* – currently available on the Saskatchewan Association of Chiefs of Police website www.sacp.ca
 - *Media Kit* – a draft was shared with participants

- *Financial and emotional support from community members or organizations* – Victims Services proposal on short term funding for families of missing persons was shared
- **Recommendation 5.1: The provincial government, in partnership with police services....should consult with families of missing persons to determine the form or forms that a provincial memorial to missing persons could take...**
 - Discussions focused on participant views on whether or how a memorial to missing persons could be developed?

i) Missing Persons Checklist

While the checklist was generally well-received, a number of suggestions were made which will be considered in future revisions:

- Consider re-ordering a number of sections. For instance, putting information on starting a log or journal very near the beginning of the checklist;
- Include a box on the missing person's ethnicity;
- Simplify the language in the checklist where possible

The language contained in the checklist needs to be clear so individuals of all reading abilities understand the advice that is given.

ii) Media Kit

There was support for the continued development of a media kit:

- Information on the family spokesperson should state the importance of having a back up family spokesperson in case the primary spokesperson gets sick or is unavailable;
- Some families spoke about a lack of media attention to their case, which may be particularly challenging in northern or remote communities. For these families the problem wasn't getting help to manage the relationship with the media but rather was getting the media's attention;
- It would be useful to include in the media kit some information on a resource that could be contacted by families for advice;
- That the media kit may be helpful in circumstances that go beyond the context of families of missing persons, such as for Victims Services when supporting families in other circumstances;
- The language used needs to be as clear as possible so that individuals of all reading abilities are able to benefit from the media kit; and
- The media kit needs to be available on a website for easy access.

One of the important points that came out of the meetings was that different families have different relationships with the media. Currently, the Media Kit tends to give the impression that a family will be bombarded by media requests whereas the reality in some situations is a complete lack of attention paid by the media. The Media Kit may need to reflect these differences more clearly.

iii) Financial and Emotional Support for Family Members of Missing Persons

The Victims Services proposal, in response to recommendation one, on short term funding to families during the early stages of a missing person investigation, was supported by family members. However, a number of participants noted that short term financial support although helpful is not adequate. A number of families provided information on the financial stress and strain placed on them and indicated that long term financial support is needed to help offset travel costs when checking out leads, to help to continue to raise awareness of the missing person's case, etc.

iv) Views on a Memorial

Participants noted a number of concerns in relation to the concept of a memorial. Clearly, this is a sensitive issue which families tend to view differently depending on whether their loved one has been found or whether the family still remains hopeful that the loved one will be found. In the case of the latter there is little desire to 'memorialize' missing loved ones who have not yet been found because it is seen as indicating a loss of hope. Families in this category would prefer a symbol, particular location, or awareness walk to be used as a place of reflection or remembrance rather than as a memorial.

There is a clear need for further development of ideas in this area. The particular role of the Partnership Committee on this issue is not clear as the families will play a key role in any development.

b) Next Steps/Areas for Further Work

Group sessions were held in the afternoons of both meetings. Two questions were asked of family members as a focus for discussion. They were:

1. *Based on what you have heard what idea or action do you think is a significant step in improving supports to families and responses in missing person cases?*
2. *Is there something that you think still requires more action or attention and what do you want to see done?*

In terms of positive steps taken a number of the key issues raised were:

- As was the case with the meetings in 2007, many family members felt that the meetings themselves were positive steps and supported the continuing development of a partnership response, including families as partners. Many family members thanked PPCMP members for organizing the meetings and putting in the time and effort to update them and allow them the opportunity to voice their concerns and opinions about future direction.
- A number of broader comments acknowledged the extensive amount of work done by the PPCMP as well as other agencies. A number of family members from longer

term missing person's cases noted how the work that has been completed will make the situation more manageable for current families of missing persons.

- Specific mention was made in relation to benefits resulting from changes to legislation resulting from the passage of *The Missing Persons and Presumption of Death Act*.
- That the media kit and checklist were seen as helpful for families going through the tragedy of a missing person experience in the future.

In terms of areas that need additional attention the following key themes were identified:

- ***On-going Communication:*** The continuing importance and necessity for improved communication between investigators and families of missing persons was raised repeatedly throughout both meetings. Family members need to know that work is still being done and that their family member has not been forgotten. Even if there are no additional details to be given to the family, contact and communication is still important. This was one of the issues raised at the 2007 meetings and was addressed as part of recommendation 9.2 in the Final Report of the Partnership Committee and clearly remains a top of mind issue for family members.
- ***Networking for families:*** Many families raised the need to develop a more comprehensive support network for families of missing persons. Families were pleased to hear about both Child Find's Connecting Families program and the planned expansion of the Victims Service's mandate, but felt that a more formalized network of support involving families would also be beneficial. This discussion reinforces recommendation 3 of the Final Report. Questions were raised about how such a network could be developed and what role families could have in supporting future meetings.
- ***Financial Support for Families:*** The need for long term financial/emotional supports may also be linked to the development of a support network. The network could undertake fundraising, part, or all of which would be used to support other families. As well, it was identified that families dealing with long term missing person cases feel current community or other supports are marginal at best. Support tends to wane the longer an investigation is ongoing, but the family may continue to have financial/emotional support needs. Again, long term support could at least in part be addressed through the development of a support network.
- ***Search and Rescue Capacity:*** The lack of search and rescue local capacity or access to support on searches was raised a number of times. It was acknowledged that search and rescue capacity needs to be enhanced in many parts of the province. Many families felt that they were left predominantly responsible for searching for their missing loved one.
- ***Support tools for families:*** Media kits and checklists were supported but a number of suggestions in relation to the media kit and checklist were raised as discussed above.
- ***Jurisdictional Issues:*** Concerns were raised about the jurisdictional limits of the Saskatchewan response. A need was identified to consider how to deal with jurisdictional issues in relation to a number of cases where the missing person disappeared outside Saskatchewan or where the investigation involves a police force

outside of Saskatchewan. It was noted that jurisdictional issues can increase the confusion for families around who to contact and how to proceed.

- **Prevention and Awareness:** Participants felt there was a need to address prevention and awareness, including that any family can suffer the tragedy of a missing person. There was agreement on the need for increased education for youth about the risks of going missing as well as the risks of running away. As well, it was identified that more men and community leaders needed to become involved in developing a response to missing persons.
- **Missing Aboriginal Women:** A number of families raised concerns around the disproportionate number of Aboriginal women going missing within Saskatchewan and emphasized the need for everyone to understand and respond to this concern.
- **Continued development of the Partnership:** Many family members and other participants spoke about the benefit of meetings with families and how families could be partners in developing the response to missing person's cases. It was suggested that future meetings might be scheduled for weekends or evenings to ensure participation of more families and some interest in families playing more of a role in the meetings.

Conclusion and Next Steps

As was the case with the family meetings held in 2007 the Partnership Committee wants to express its deep appreciation to the family members who participated in meetings with Committee members in October of 2009. The comments and discussion both during and following the meetings frame and give direction to the Partnership Committee on future work that needs to be undertaken. As well, we would like to thank those in attendance from the Dispute Resolution Office for helping to facilitate our family meetings. As discussed above, families highlighted nine areas that need further attention and this section briefly discusses next steps the PPCMP is taking in regard to those areas:

- **Improved Communication** – Recommendation 9.2 of the Final Report of the Partnership Committee addresses the issue of improved communication between families and investigating agencies. Upcoming police policy will address and standardize protocol in relation to communication between families and investigators.
- **Networking for Families** – Currently under discussion between Partnership Committee members as to how to proceed.
- **Financial Support for Families** – Steps are being undertaken by the Victims Services Branch at the Ministry of Justice to provide financial support on a short term basis.
- **Search and Rescue Capacity** – The Partnership Committee will continue to work with SARSAV on developing responses and capacity
- **Support Tools for Families** – Both the checklist and media kit will be revised to reflect necessary changes.
- **Jurisdictional Issues** – Clarification of jurisdictional issues will be raised with the Saskatchewan Association of Chiefs of Police.
- **Prevention and Awareness** – The Partnership Committee will continue to look for opportunities to support prevention and awareness work.

- ***Missing Aboriginal Women*** – The Partnership Committee will continue to support work with First Nations, Métis and Aboriginal Communities on this issue
- ***Continued Development of the Partnership*** – Issues raised in this section will be taken under consideration in any future planning by the Partnership Committee.

APPENDIX “A”

Summary of Work Completed on Recommendations

As was outlined at the meetings on October 14 and 16, 2009, a significant amount of work has been undertaken on implementing recommendations contained in the Final Report of the PPCMP. This work is summarized below:

Recommendation 1: Developing supports for families

- **Checklist** – currently available on the Saskatchewan Association of Chiefs of Police website at www.sacp.ca
- **Media Kit** – a draft was shared with families and is in the process of being finalized at which point it will be put on the SACP website
- **Financial and Emotional Support** – Victim’s Services has developed a proposal for short term funding for families of missing persons

Recommendation 2: The development of media best practice standards

- Still under discussion

Recommendation 3: Families should be assisted to develop a support network

- This recommendation has in part been addressed by Child Find’s initiative on Connecting Families. As well further discussion on this issue is underway between Partnership Committee members.

Recommendation 4: Legislation is needed to deal with missing persons and their estates

- Addressed under *The Missing Persons and Presumption of Death Act* which was proclaimed in force on September 28, 2009.

Recommendation 5.1: Consult families on the form or forms of a memorial to missing persons

- Consultation undertaken as part of meetings with families on October 14 and 16, 2009

Recommendation 5.2: The topic of creating a national memorial for missing persons should be raised nationally

- Justice Minister Don Morgan raised this issue nationally with other Federal Provincial Territorial Ministers Responsible for Justice in fall 2008 and fall 2009.

Recommendation 6: The police provincially and nationally need a national or linked websites on missing persons

- The Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police has formed a Committee to develop a national website and Justice Minister Morgan has raised the issue with Federal Provincial and Territorial Ministers Responsible for Justice in fall 2008 and fall 2009.

Recommendation 7.0: Information/education materials should be developed on all aspects of missing persons situations

- Some educational materials have been developed by some members of PPCMP [Child Find's Tween and Teen Program as well as work undertaken by the Alzheimer Society.]

Recommendation 7.1: Agencies should conduct presentations on awareness, prevention and personal safety

- Considerable work is being done on this issue by Child Find. As well Sisters in Spirit and the FSIN Women's Commission have also undertake work in this area.

Recommendation 7.2: An inventory of agencies involved in missing person cases is needed

- The inventory has been completed and is in the process of being finalized.

Recommendation 7.3: Police should ensure that information about police policy, procedure and practices is available

- This issue has been referred to SACP.

Recommendation 8: Information to increase awareness about the risks of going missing should be available in all schools

- Child Find is working with the Ministry of Education and other partners on presenting their Tweens and Teens program across the province.

Recommendation 9.1: The Saskatchewan Police Commission should review its current policy and develop and implement an overarching provincial Missing Person Policy for all police agencies

- A draft policy has been completed and is currently being reviewed by all policing agencies.

Recommendation 10: A process is required to fan out missing persons reports to all relevant police agencies in the province immediately

- This recommendation has been referred to SACP.

Recommendation 11: Police should establish protocols with community agencies to provide a formal system to fan out "Missing Persons Information"

- Referred to SACP.

Recommendation 12.1 and 12.2: Amend provincial and national legislation to permit the disclosure of information on missing persons to police conducting a missing person's investigation

- Provincial reform addressed through the passage of *The Missing Persons and Presumption of Death Act in 2009 and amendments to the Health Information Protection Act*. As well Minister Morgan has raised this issue with Federal

Provincial and Territorial Ministers Responsible for Justice in fall 2008 and fall 2009.

Recommendation 13: The mandate of Victim Services should include the provision of support to families of missing people

- It has been determined that Victim Services programs do have the mandate to support families of missing persons in some circumstances. However, a protocol is needed to clearly outline the types of cases that are appropriate for Victim Services response, and to ensure that police refer the appropriate cases to Victim Services programs. Victims Services met with the Saskatchewan Association of Chiefs of Police (SACP) on October 14, 2009 to discuss this recommendation. The SACP is supportive of developing a protocol, and has agreed to work with Victims Services on this.

Recommendation 14.1: The province and local government need to enhance search and rescue resources province-wide

- This recommendation is addressed as part of a broader response by Corrections, Public Safety and Policing to emergency planning.

Recommendation 14.2: The province, communities and search and rescue organizations need to work cooperatively to ensure effective Search and Rescue responses

- Addressed through work with Search and Rescue Volunteer Association of Saskatchewan and federal/provincial partners.

Recommendation 15: Saskatchewan police need to establish protocols on how to engage search and rescue capacity in a missing person's event

- Referred to SACP.

Recommendation 16: Schools should develop policies and procedures for collaborating with police in missing person's cases

- Referred to Education.

Recommendation 17: Research on runaways is needed to better understand the issues related to the high number of runaways

- The Ministry of Justice has undertaken a research project on this issue which will be completed in spring 2010.

Recommendation 18: A caseworker pilot with a police service should be funded

- Under further consideration. That said, the Regina Police Service is involved in a project called Kids in Crisis which responds partially to this recommendation.

Recommendation 19: The provincial government, the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations, the Métis Nation of Saskatchewan, First Nations, and Métis

communities and organizations should be encouraged to develop and enhance mutually supportive strategies in missing persons cases

- Work is continuing on this issue through the PPCMP.

Recommendation 20: a voluntary national information base on potential missing persons could be created

- Minister Morgan raised with Federal Provincial Territorial Ministers Responsible for Justice in fall 2008 and fall 2009.