

MISSING WOMEN COMMISSION OF INQUIRY

STANDING TOGETHER AND MOVING FORWARD: THE NORTHWEST CONSULTATIONS

A CONSULTATION REPORT PREPARED FOR
THE MISSING WOMEN COMMISSION OF INQUIRY

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Statement of Purpose

This paper is a consultation report prepared for the Missing Women Commission of Inquiry to provide background information.

The content of the report does not necessarily reflect the views of the Commissioner and Commission staff and, in particular, no conclusions have been reached on the issues raised in this report.

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I. INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

The Northwest Consultation Report complements the original Missing Women's Commission Inquiry report, *Standing Together and Moving Forward*, in intent, purpose, and mandate.

In September 2011, the Missing Women Commission of Inquiry held seven Community Forums in Northwest British Columbia. During the Community Forums, the Commission heard the central message that Aboriginal and rural women are still falling through the cracks of our public safety net. The Commission heard from many people who made oral presentations during the seven forums including victim family members, community members and resource people. The vast majority missing and murdered women along the northwest part of Highway 16 are Aboriginal women.

The Commission enlisted me, Linda Locke, Q.C., an Advisor to the Commission and author of this report, to conduct follow up policy consultations. The follow up policy consultations took place in early May, six months after original Community Forums, and while Policy Forums were ongoing in Vancouver. The aim of these consultations was to learn more about the Northwest and to provide the Northwest communities with the opportunity to make recommendations for change and actions to address the issues surrounding missing and murdered women.

However, there is a special emphasis in this follow up report. While exploring the events and circumstances of the missing women of Northwest British Columbia, this report is also intended to highlight this region's Aboriginal culture, identifying elements of indigenous beliefs including connections to the land, matrilineal aspects of belief systems, worldview, and the importance of health and reconciliation. These cultural elements augment the findings of *Standing Together and Moving Forward* and promote a better understanding of the impact of the missing women in the Northwest in the experience of individuals and peoples.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Although for reasons of confidentiality, the participants are not named here, I gratefully acknowledge them and their courage and generosity in coming forward to share their stories and recommendations.

A sincere thank you to all the people who worked with me in the coordination of the follow up policy consultations and the efforts made to contact individuals and groups who wanted to participate. I am very grateful to the following who contributed their positive energy, time and wisdom to the process: Cheryl Mikolayczyk, Shirley Gray, David Dickinson, April Link, Audrey

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PURPOSE OF THE NORTHWEST CONSULTATIONS

The Missing Women Commission of Inquiry held follow up consultations in the Northwest to obtain recommendations from the participants, many of whom had attended earlier meetings of the Missing Women Commission Inquiry Public Forums held in the Northwest in September, 2012. These meetings were designed in part to compensate for the fact that the Commission was unable to fund the participation of the Northwest representatives in the policy forums that were being held in Vancouver.

The purpose of the follow up consultations was to give the Northwest people an opportunity to provide clear and thoughtful recommendations for change regarding the safety of women, practice and procedures of the police, and recommendations for healing, reconciliation and implementation. The follow up policy consultations were key events to produce recommendations regarding the following: to ensure the safety of vulnerable Aboriginal and rural women; to enable change regarding police practice and procedures with these matters; and to enable the communities to create substantive change through healing, reconciliation and implementation of changes.

METHODOLOGY

CONSULTATION FORMAT

The Northwest policy consultations were organized very quickly as focus groups, and invitations were sent to people based on their identified interest and expertise. Participants from the seven Missing Women Commission Inquiry Northwest Public Forums were contacted by phone, e-mail, social media or direct conversation, and invited to attend follow up meetings in a number of Northwest communities. Additional participants were also sought. The criteria for inviting consultation participants was open-ended: Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people were invited, but because most of the missing women were Aboriginal, the majority of participants with a strong desire to take part were Aboriginal family and community members of the missing women.

This focus group approach permitted participation by more people and in longer conversations. These consultations were primarily focused on receiving recommendations for change from the

Northwest, particularly the Aboriginal communities regarding their missing and murdered teenagers and young women.

As described below, the consultations of this Report took place in five focus groups. The initial consultation meeting was with the Moricetown and Smithers participants together; the second and third consultations took place in Terrace with the Nisga'a and Kitsumkalum; the fourth meeting was held in Gitanyow; and the fifth consultation meeting was held in Prince Rupert. When the Hazelton people could not attend, telephone interviews were held to ensure their recommendations were heard.

NW Policy Consultation One was held April 28, 2012 in Smithers, in the Boston Pizza private meeting room, and 13 participants attended from the Smithers and Moricetown communities. Due to time limitations, invitations to participate went out by telephone, twitter and email. The participants were victim family members and/or were resource people. The consultation meetings went on for about 3.5 hours. The Vancouver Policy Forums list was used for discussion. Linda Locke was the facilitator and Cheryl Mikolaycyck was the note taker.

NW Policy Consultations Two and Three took place in Terrace on May 17, 2012, at the Boston Pizza semi-private space and met with the (5) Nisga'a representatives, including one Gitxsan, met from 12:00 noon until 3:30 p.m. A further consultation meeting with (5) Kitsumkalum and Kitselas representatives met from 5:00 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. at the same place. A Kitselas (Tsimshian) member, Shirley Gray assisted in contacting individuals and communities by telephone and email inviting them to attend the consultation. Linda Locke was the facilitator and Shirley Gray was the note taker.

NW Policy Consultation Four was held at the Gitanyow Health Station on the 24th of May with 8 participants from Gitanyow and Gitsegukla for 3.5 hours. Cheryl Mikolayczyk coordinated the meeting by telephone, fax and email. Cheryl also interviewed one additional participant and her notes are included with this meeting as she is from Gitanyow and is related to two of the missing women. Linda Locke facilitated the meeting and Cheryl was the notetaker.

NW Policy Consultation Five was held in Prince Rupert on May 28th, 2012 in the private room at the Crest Hotel for 3.5 hours. There were 5 participants who were contacted by telephone and email with the help of April Link, counsellor at the Stopping the Violence Program at the Northcoast Transition Society. USCLAS staff in addition to Shirley Gray from Terrace invited other organizations such as the Friendship Society, Northwest Community College and so on. Most of the participants were involved with Stopping the Violence against Women committee. There might have been more participants, however some people were apparently feeling that nothing was coming out of all these meetings regarding the Missing and Murdered Women.

The **final NW Policy Consultation meeting** was set for May 29, 2012 at the USCLAS Law Center. Potential participants were invited from Hazelton and surrounding communities. Due to extenuating circumstances, including an Aboriginal family health crisis in the community and two local deaths, potential participants were not able to attend. This reflects the local Aboriginal tradition that when someone dies, everything, including work, stops and all community members connected to the family become focused on the process of death and closure, a process that usually

goes on for a week. It should be noted that this closure has not been possible with the missing and murdered teenagers and young women.

Telephone interviews: Cheryl Mikolayczyk telephoned potential participants and interviewed them on the telephone, focusing on the questions listed in the policy forum guides. Linda Locke was present for many of the phone interviews. Cheryl interviewed eight people from Hazelton, Gitanmaax, Kispiox, Hagwilget and Two-Mile, and made notes regarding their recommendations.

In summary, a total of five follow up consultation meetings were held, in addition to individual interviews with Hazelton/Gitxsan Elders, resource people and community members. The Northwest follow up consultation process included 44 active participants who provided feedback and recommendations on the issues.

QUESTIONS & METHODOLOGY

The Northwest consultations differed from the Vancouver Policy Forums in that each was focused on a particular rural community and the experiences and challenges that community had faced with regard to missing and murdered Aboriginal women. There were some commonalities with the Vancouver area Policy Forums, as some of the missing and murdered women came from the Northwest communities; however, the Northwest consultations were distinct in a number of ways. Participants noted that a very high percentage of the women missing along Highway 16 were not sex trade workers and were not identified as addicted to alcohol or other substances. Furthermore, most of the missing women in the Northwest were between the ages of 14 to 24 and were not known to be hitchhikers. Because of the youth factor, many of the participants wanted to refer to the missing women and as teenagers and/or young women.

This changed the focus of some of the questions addressed during the consultations. The emphasis of the Northwest consultations was to develop recommendations regarding the safety of vulnerable teenagers and young women; on preventing violence against Aboriginal and rural women; on creating changes in police practices and policy regarding missing teenagers and young women in the rural areas located alongside Highway 16; and with regard to healing and reconciliation within the context of Northwest Aboriginal communities.

A discussion questionnaire based on the materials of the earlier consultations in Vancouver was adapted for the Northwest circumstances. The discussion questionnaire is attached in the Appendices. The organization of questions reflected many of the topics from the Policy Forums held in Vancouver on May 1st, May 3rd, May 7th, May 8th, and May 10th, 2012.¹ Additionally, some of the questions for discussion were taken from the Policy Forum booklets developed for each forum. The relevant Policy Forums were:

¹ See the Missing Women Commission of Inquiry website for further information about the Policy Forums: <http://www.missingwomeninquiry.ca/forums/>.

Policy Forum 1 - Ensuring the Safety of Vulnerable Women:

(B) Preventing Violence against Aboriginal and Rural Women

(C) Building Strong Police-Community Relationships

Policy Forum 3 - Improving Missing Person Practices:

(A) Accepting and Investigating Missing Person Reports

(B) Police Relationships with Victims' Families, the Community, the Public and the Media

Policy Forum 5 - Enhancing Police Accountability

Policy Forum 6-From Report to Substantive Change—Healing, Reconciliation and Implementation

These discussions aimed to elicit qualitative information. Themes were drawn from the discussions, identifying recurring topics related to the discussion questionnaire.

II. BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT OF FIRST NATIONS IN THE NORTHWEST

Any understanding of the experience of people, and particularly Aboriginal people, in the North West of B.C. begins with the land and cultures. The missing and murdered women of the North West disappeared in a very different world than that of the urban South. This short backgrounder provides an overview of the world that they knew -- a beautiful and remote area, sparsely populated, with its own distinct cultures. It also highlights factors that have contributed to poverty and demoralization through generations, as a result of unemployment and low levels of education.

GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

Geographically, Northwest BC² is centred on the Highway 16 corridor, from Prince Rupert to Houston. This area has a moderate interior climate. The wetter, more moderate marine climate extends quite far inland along the major rivers, including the Skeena, Nass, and Stikine. The area is heavily forested with western hemlock, amabilis fir, and western cedar. East of Smithers, the climate becomes more continental, meaning colder winters, hotter summers, and less precipitation. The forests become dominated by white spruce, lodgepole pine, and sub-alpine fir. On the coast, Sitka spruce takes the place of white spruce. In between, in the Hazelton area, these two hybridize to form the Roche spruce.³

Between Prince Rupert and Smithers, the area is dominated by the Coast Range -- rugged, geologically-recent mountains. East of Smithers, the topography of the interior plain extending to Prince George is much more flat and rolling. The coastal geography means there are relatively few roads.

The Skeena, Nass, and Stikine are all major salmon producing rivers. The Skeena is the largest salmon producer in BC after the Fraser. The Nass is also known for its eulachon, a small smelt-like fish which was, and still is, prized by First Nations for its oil, better known as "grease." All these major rivers have experienced serious declines in salmon production in the last one hundred years.

² A note on terminology: Because of the Alaska Panhandle, which separates Northern BC from the coast, Prince Rupert is the most northerly coastal city, the coastal area adjacent to the Northwest is known as the *North Coast*. On the other hand, the Burns Lake area east of Houston is generally known as the Interior. If you look at a map of BC you'll see that Prince George is located in the middle of the province, not the north. Thus, the *Northwest* is named so because of its proximity to the *North Coast*.

³ A. MacKinnon, J. Pojar, and R. Coupé (eds.), *Plants of Northern British Columbia* (B.C. Ministry of Forests and Lone Pine Publishing, Vancouver, 1992).

All Pacific salmon species may be found here, including the world famous steelhead trout. Black bears are abundant in the Northwest and grizzlies may be locally common. For example, grizzlies are often sighted within the city limits of Kitimat along the Kitimat River, about an hour's drive from Terrace, on the coast. Many people may believe that the so-called "spirit bear" (or Kermode), which is a white phase of the black bear, is only found on the Central Coast, near Princess Royal Island. In fact, Kermodes are found at least as far inland as Hazelton -- and the town symbol of Terrace is a Kermode bear. Moose are relatively abundant, mule deer less so. In pre-contact times, elk were the most common large ungulate. Wolves are common in the area, cougars less so.⁴

This is still a largely rural area, with relatively small urban centres and tight-knit rural communities. The local economies are dependent on natural resource extraction, and people still have a close connection to the land. Many local people are hunters and fisherman.

ECONOMIC PICTURE

Compared to the rest of BC, the economy in the Northwest is depressed. According to the Institute of Chartered Accountants,⁵ the unemployment rate in British Columbia in 2010 was 7.6 per cent. In the Northwest, it was 10.2 per cent. Youth unemployment in BC was 11.3 per cent. In the Northwest, it was 23.8 per cent. The percentage of the population age 19 to 64 on social assistance in BC as a whole was 1.7 per cent. In the Northwest, it was 4.9 per cent. The 5-year (from 2005 to 2010) percentage point change in bankruptcies in BC was a 7.3 per cent increase. In the North Coast Development Region (which includes both the North Coast and Northwest), bankruptcies increased 20.9 per cent.

The Institute of Chartered Accountants made the following conclusions:

In 2010, the labour market contracted for the second consecutive year, contributing to a decline in the employment rate. Northwest BC recorded the highest unemployment rate in the province. Full-time employment dropped considerably, producing a decline in personal incomes, and the goods-producing sector continued to founder, with employment now at its lowest level than more than a decade. The rate of youth unemployment is now more than twice the BC average.⁶

This has profound effects for everyone living in Northwest BC, but particularly for youth. Jobs are scarce and few have the resources to afford to own and maintain their own vehicles, making it difficult to travel between areas for work.

⁴ Eugene N. Kozloff. *Plants and Animals of Pacific Northwest* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2003).

⁵ Institute of Chartered Accountants, *2011 BC Check-Up: North Coast Development Region*, online: http://www.bccheckup.com/pdfs/reg_nc_2011.pdf.

⁶ *Ibid*, p. 9.

EDUCATION

Performance rates for Northwest youth in education are also low. Every three years, school districts need to renew "District Achievement Contracts" with the Ministry of Education. Coast Mountains School District 82 includes Terrace, Kitimat, and Hazelton. The last District Achievement Contract the District did was in 2007/2008. Since then, the District writes that Foundation Skills Assessment (FSA) results show a "disturbing decrease" in the percentage of all learners and Aboriginal learners in Grade 4 and 7 meeting expectations. Grade 4 reading comprehension was down 12 per cent for all learners and 14 per cent for Aboriginal learners. Grade 4 writing was down 33 per cent for all learners and 32 per cent for Aboriginal learners. Grade 4 numeracy was down 13 per cent for all learners and 13 per cent for Aboriginal learners. The numbers for Grade 7 are similarly grim. The six year completion rate for all learners in BC was 79 per cent and 68 per cent for all learners in District 82. The rate for Aboriginals throughout BC was 47 per cent and 44 per cent for Aboriginal learners in District 82.⁷

Poor formal education performance means less access to skilled jobs and to higher education that would provide more opportunities in the skilled work force. The Institute of Chartered Accountants reports that in 2010 the percent of the labour force age 25 to 54 with a post-secondary certificate/diploma or higher in BC was 64.4 per cent, while in Northwest BC it was 54.0 per cent. The 5-year change for BC was an 8.3 per cent increase, while in Northwest BC the increase was 4.7 percentage points.

As a result of the diminished opportunities, youth in the Northwest often suffer from low self-esteem.

FIRST NATIONS POPULATION

A diverse mix of First Nations populates the Northwest. The First Nations of the Northwest were recognized by anthropologists like Franz Boas for their complex social systems and intricate cultural practices, such as potlatching and raising totem poles. The Tsimshian, Nisga'a, and Gitksan speak related languages -- Tsimshian on the coast and near Terrace, Nisga'a in the Nass valley, and Gitksan in the Upper Skeena area. Across Hecate Strait, on Haida Gwaii, the Haida speak an unrelated language, but are culturally similar to their mainland neighbours. The Haisla, who speak a Kwakwaka'wakw language, are relatively new immigrants to Kitimat, having migrated north from the Central Coast. They have adopted many of the customs of their Tsimshian neighbours. North of Terrace are the Tahltan and Inland Tlingit. East and south of the Gitksan are the Wet'suwet'en, who like the Tahltan, speak a Dene language. North of the Haida and Coast Tsimshian, in Alaskan territory are the Coast Tlingit. (The Haida and Tsimshian each have one village in Southeast Alaska.)

⁷ British Columbia, Ministry of Education School District Profile: Coast Mountains, online: <http://www.newsroom.gov.bc.ca/factsheets/downloads/82%20-%20Coast%20Mountains.pdf>.

These peoples maintained permanent villages and produced surpluses of preserved sockeye salmon, eulachon grease, and other trade goods. The Gitksan were well-positioned as middlemen in the trade between coastal and inland groups. The complex social systems are still adhered to today, for the most part. Each of the four clans -- eagle, frog, wolf, and killer whale -- is made up of numerous units called house groups. The societies are matrilineal. The child is born into his or her mother's house group. So, at the feast hall, the children do not sit with their father, who belongs to another house group in another clan. Clan members must marry outside their clan.

Today, First Nations people make up a large proportion of the population of the Northwest. Although there are numerically more Aboriginal people living in the greater Vancouver area than in the Northwest, the *proportion* of the population which is Aboriginal is much higher in the Northwest. The overall proportion of Aboriginal people in BC is 5 per cent. In Prince Rupert, the proportion is 35 per cent, Terrace is 16 per cent, and Burns Lake is 37 per cent.⁸

CONNECTIONS BETWEEN THE NORTHWEST AND DOWNTOWN EAST SIDE OF VANCOUVER

Aboriginal women are strongly represented among the marginalized people of Vancouver's Downtown East Side. Their reality is often marked by poverty, discrimination, addictions and violence. Many of these women began their lives in the communities of the Northwest and some have been named as missing or murdered. These women are not nameless statistics in their original Northern towns; people still remember them as daughters, sisters, wives and friends, individuals who were central to people's lives and vital in their communities.

The entire community experiences trauma when they "lose one of their own." Tribal connections are very close – a loss affects everyone. A loss must be acknowledged and mourned in order to heal the grief. Otherwise the grief becomes generational.

Aboriginal people living in remote Northwest communities are very closely connected to each other, their families and friends, and practice their cultural and traditional beliefs. The issues that differentiate them from the southern context are both cultural and geographic. Family supports and traditional services are available to the Northwest community members, but the network of government services may not be.

Many Aboriginal family ties are based upon extended family, rather than upon a nuclear family model. In the Northwest kinship ties are not limited to blood lines. It is common for large extended families to gather when there is a health crisis within a family. This gathering of extended family is a demonstration of respect and support for the ill or dying individual and provides support for those family members most affected. Elders are integral to providing support and guidance to the family

⁸ 2006 Census – Data on Aboriginal People: Quick Facts, online: http://www.bchousing.org/resources/Housing_Initiatives/AHI/BC_2006_Census_Aboriginal_Peoples_Quick_Facts.pdf.

and special ceremonies and healing methods are used. Compassion is a vital part of dealing with illness, death and dying in Aboriginal communities.

In the summaries of discussions that follow, most of the focus is on the unique situation in the Northwest and the conditions under which young women go missing there, which is significantly different from that in Southern BC. However, it must also be recognized that some of the women who went missing from Vancouver's Downtown Eastside and who were ultimately murdered were themselves from the Northwest. In addition to the conditions that increase the vulnerability of young women, and especially Aboriginal women, within the Northwest communities, there may be conditions that increase young women's vulnerability by encouraging them to leave those communities. Both of those situations deserve to be addressed.

NARRATIVE EXPLORATION OF THE NORTH WEST EXPERIENCE

While geography, history, and economics are important in describing the North West, equally important are the narrative and stories of those who have lost loved ones. A Nisga'a woman by the name of Millie Percival has kindly provided this compelling story of her childhood friend, Becky. This personal history illustrates the connection between the North West and the South. Becky was one of the first of the missing women. Her story about a young Aboriginal woman who began her life in the North West and disappeared mysteriously from Vancouver in 1983 accentuates one of the connections between the Northwest and the South, a fitting introduction to the discussions:

Becky's Story

Becky was born May 25, 1960. She's not simply a name on a newspaper clipping. She is my dear friend, and in our culture she is my sister. The guilt and pain I feel when I say her name never goes away.

One of my first memories of her was sitting on a bench overlooking the river; it was a brilliantly sunny spring day. I must have been about 6, she would have been 5. I remember feeling alone in the world, like I didn't really matter to anyone. Then her bubbly voice asked me what I was doing, and she reminded me that we were cousins. Her smile and constant chattering made me forget the desperate loneliness which was consuming me. She stood behind me stroking my hair and asked me if I was waiting for someone. Before I had a chance to answer she told me that she was in trouble and was waiting for her Auntie not to be mad at her anymore, then she was going back inside (pointing to a nearby house). She sat down beside me and said she'd better leave my hair alone even though she knew how to fix hair. Just when I thought about asking her what she did wrong, she informed me that she had cut her sisters hair and it looked nice but her Auntie was very mad at her. She quickly added that her Auntie might not be so mad now and grabbed my hand, pulled me along and invited me to go inside with her. Sensing my fear, she reassured me that her Auntie was probably my Auntie too, besides she was really nice, and maybe it will be hard for her to stay mad when she sees beautiful you. She burst into the house in much the same way that she burst into my thoughts; yelling for Auntie to guess who came to visit. Auntie was washing clothes on a scrub board, she wiped her hands on a towel and stood directly in front of Becky and said, "I'm still mad at you;" to which Becky responded by throwing her arms around Auntie's waist and proclaimed that she already said she was sorry and smiled up at her saying, "I know you love me Auntie, you

can't stay mad forever." Auntie rubbed Becky's head and shoulders smiling and in a quiet loving voice said "Rebecca..." then she turned to me and excitedly exclaimed "Lady Esta, where did you come from?" Becky looked at me and said "See, I told you she's nice."

When Becky's mom died, Auntie took the two youngest girls. Becky and her two older brothers remained with their dad who worked as a logger and like many of our parents, struggled with alcohol. Becky and the boys were sent to residential school. Whenever their dad paid for their trip to visit home, Becky spent a lot of time with us. She'd share stories of Lytton and later Coquitlam... and people she knew there. She said she didn't like it there. But being a little girl so full of life, she never saw any reason to feel sorry for herself. She was happy to have family to come home to. She loved it when mom teased her about how she pronounced Ly'on and Coqui'lam. She'd hug mom and say "I just know you love me, Auntie." Once in awhile Becky would kind of mention in a small far away voice that some people aren't very nice, then she'd happily announce in her bubbly way, "But I'm here now."

It seemed so long between visits home, but she would always burst in the door and hold my hand and say, "We're best friends, remember?"

When I was a teenager I went through a lot of depression; by that time Becky was home, going to our new high school. I'd confide in her about my worries; she would quietly listen and then she'd hug me and confirm that life is hard to understand, "But that's why we have each other" she'd say in her lively way.

She proudly played softball and never let me miss practice. She loved that my mom was one of the coaches.

Becky was well into her first pregnancy when she finally told me; when I asked her why she didn't tell me she playfully pushed me and said "I just did!" I argued my point and she happily argued hers, saying that I think too hard about things, that's why I'm so sad all the time. I couldn't argue past that.

Not long after her baby was born, my husband and I (at the time he was still my boyfriend) were at Becky's dad's house; Becky brought her baby over to me and put him in my arms and smiled. After a long silence, she said that he needs two good parents and matter-of-factly asked if we would consider taking him. She said she knew we were going to be together forever and we had what it takes to be good parents for him. For the first time ever, I seen her cry, she cried her heart out. She said her and her dad talked it over many times and she knew the baby deserved more than what she could offer....she said we didn't have to answer right away and joked that we could let her know in a couple of minutes. I was just turning 17 and desperately wanted to take him, but I was afraid.

A few weeks later her dad sent her and the baby to visit her cousin in the Lower Mainland.

Becky returned alone a couple of months later. She came to see me...cried really hard and quickly collected herself and told me that she decided to let them adopt him. She said, they are really nice and they love him and she was happy that he was going to grow up with a mom and dad. She cried many times about it.

We got married and remained in a close friendship with Becky. She fell in love with my cousin; they moved to Terrace and had a baby boy. They were so proud of him, she always seemed to

be marching around, wearing her happiness. Then crib death took him away and that death really devastated them. They moved to Vancouver. On one of her visits home, she told me that they were having a difficult time financially, mostly because of the choices they make. She hinted that drugs were creeping into their lives and she wasn't sure if their relationship could withstand everything. I later learned that they were no longer together.

I'd go and visit my uncle – (Becky's dad) about every 3 weeks or so to see if he'd heard from her. They talked on the phone regularly and he'd update me. He had a respiratory condition and needed to cart an oxygen tank where ever he went, but now and then he would make his way up the hill to our house and we'd chat about how much we missed her and whatever they talked about on the phone. He had gotten a settlement of some sort and was excited to let me know that he was paying her and her third son's way home for a visit. One day I was washing the floor and spotted her right outside my window. I ran outside to greet her. She introduced me to her son. During the course of our conversation she said "I'm a prostitute, Millie; I can't really explain why. But it's a living, we do what we have to do....life's not that bad. I have my baby and that's all that matters to me. His dad is really good to us, but I'm gonna keep doing what I do, his dad knows that and we are happy to be parents to our baby. I'm gonna go back in a couple of days; daddy said he'll give me some money and it'll be good for the baby. Money doesn't last, but his dad and I will make sure the baby is looked after all the time. We're happy and that's what matters. I'm not ashamed of myself." And she asked, "Are you ashamed of me?"....I told her I could never be ashamed of her. She said "I knew it!", then she hugged me she told me not to worry about her even though it might be the last time we will ever see one another. I couldn't find the words to answer her.

Millie Percival provided a follow up summary of the trauma experience by family and friends regarding Becky's sudden disappearance in Vancouver:

Two weeks later, my uncle came up the trail carting his oxygen tank and knocked on our door. He told me Becky was missing. We talked a long time. He cried. He said he was going to go and look for her. I'd never seen him worry or cry. He said he was going to need a place for the baby and wanted to know if we would take him. He told me to think it over, and we would talk more before he leaves for Vancouver. He said he chose me because I am the baby's mother and I live right close by, so he could see his grandfather all the time. I didn't fully understand what he meant when he said I was the baby's mother.

I did not see him again until he got back. He came to see us, he told me about how big Vancouver is, and how he cried walking the streets day after day, not knowing where he was going or who to talk to. He told me that he wanted to go back and keep looking, but he was so tired and Vancouver was just hopelessly big, like she just got swallowed up. I pictured him pulling his oxygen tank along the streets; he said that people didn't even care about him and maybe they thought he was just a bum who didn't care about anything. He asked me if we were getting ready to take the boy-I said yes. He said that Becky's cousin offered to keep the baby and it was better for the brothers to be together. He apologized; we agreed that the boy was in the best place.

I don't know how many times I've thought about her and just felt sick and absolutely empty.

When the news of the Pickton farm came out it felt like I was being slammed in the chest by grief and fear over and over. I have never sat and talked with her brothers about it, but I really wanted to. I didn't know how they would feel about me bringing it up and asking the

questions I wanted to ask. I'd look at her boys and see so much of her in them, I wanted so badly to hug them and tell them how I adored their mom. Hers was not among the DNA found there, and I have this horrible feeling that it was missed. It's been 29 years and when I read or hear something about the Pickton case the pain grips me and I wish with my whole being that I could just know where she is and tell her that she was a good mama and she did the right thing for her boys; I wish I could be there for her just once, the way she was for me, my whole life. Just once to hold her hand and tell her that I will never forget that we are best friends...maybe to lessen the pain of any horror that she may have encountered. But we don't know, and if it has been that painful for me, I can't imagine the pain her family felt...her boys. Sometimes, guilt that I haven't been supportive enough creeps up on me. I know that I'm glad I didn't have to see her dad suffer through this.

The headline from the Vancouver Sun dated August 7, 2010 read, "A society that simply doesn't care enough: A habitué of Vancouver's Downtown Eastside, a sometime prostitute and longtime drug abuser, Rebecca Guno disappeared in June 1983."

Becky disappeared weeks after I last saw her; she still had the optimistic, grateful, sparkling spirit which could not be doused by anything. She did not look strung out...perhaps I couldn't see past the optimistic angel that I knew, but I didn't see a long time drug abuser. However, I don't doubt that she used drugs. The word habitué can mean that she frequented a place which brought her pleasure. I know that she habitually made a conscious effort to receive whatever situation she found herself in, with dignity and a deep understanding that God would not let her get into a situation that was beyond her forbearance.

She was named the first potential victim -- on the official list of women missing from the Downtown Eastside. When the Missing Women's Commission toured the province, Mr. Oppal was so compassionate within the limits of his job. He thanked us for the information we provided, but he never told us what he would do with it. I wonder if the purpose of that Commission is to ensure that Becky is now more than a faceless statistic. Will meaningful measures be taken to help us to reinstate the parenting and social skills so that we do not stand by paralyzed in pain watching our families succumb to this vicious cycle? Our spirit has been crippled beyond self-recognition.

The spiritual ways of our ancestors are an indispensable part of restoring justice in the communities. When we see one another getting caught in a vortex while trying to re-establish our lives we must hold hands. We can't let this pain continue to keep us in isolation of one another. A tiny part of my sister's legacy is that "we have each other and that's what matters most".

My Auntie, who took Becky's baby sisters must have thought about the days living in the longhouse where my uncles children would never have been removed from their familiar environment or separated; they would have simply remained in the wilp (long house) with their other mothers and all of us.

Residential school continues to send shock waves which sometimes paralyze us in fear-fear that we're not good enough, that we aren't worthy or that we are incapable of knowing how to help. When we feel the fear that our children are being pulled from us, remember that we have each other and reach out. When our mother wasn't drinking, she was barreling full speed ahead, showing us how to be community builders. Because of her I know that phrases like "what goes around comes around" must always be used in good way; and that we must do things in a caring way. She'd be so relieved that I'm finally up to bat for the culture and I'm

all proud because I'm a little more like Becky looking for what's right with my life instead of what's wrong.

Many speakers reflected on the intergenerational trauma created particularly by the loss of a mother, sister and daughter from their communities. Many also spoke of their experiences with police practices, as family and as community members, while searching for their lost ones. These follow up consultations continued to hear the deep sorrow caused by the loss of these women and how it impacts on family and communities over the years. This loss is particularly devastating to the matrilineal lineage of all of the Northwest Aboriginal peoples.

For more poetry and spiritual writings associated with the missing women, please see the section Conclusions and Recommendations for Moving Forward.

III. MAJOR THEMES OF SUBMISSIONS

The Northwest Consultations focused on four themes similar to those of the Policy Forums held in Vancouver. The unique challenges of rural and remote areas and memories of those who have lost family or friends along the highway were addressed primarily in the seven original forums held in the Northwest. The challenges however remain and need to be faced directly in a collaborative way by all communities in the northwest including villages, districts, towns, cities and Aboriginal communities.

A. ENSURING THE SAFETY OF VULNERABLE WOMEN AND PREVENTING VIOLENCE AGAINST ABORIGINAL AND RURAL WOMEN.

“How can we prevent this from happening again?”

The follow up consultations heard that most of the women missing in the Northwest were simply abducted and were not hitchhiking or in the sex trade. Use of the Highway is not optional for most of the people living nearby — the highway is the only major road through a remote and rural area. The people living along Highway 16 must travel it for work, business, school and health and/or court appointments. While a few of the missing teenager and young women were engaged in high risk behaviours, others were travelling from one point to another out of necessity. It is probable that some of the missing teenagers and young women were actually abducted. Participants wanted to ensure that the missing teenagers and young women were not “lumped in” with the Missing Women Commission Inquiry focus in Vancouver, BC, and that the unique causes of their disappearances were understood, in order to prevent further tragedy among young people. The Northwest is distinct from the South and as such they recommended that a separate inquiry be held.

Participants in the follow up consultations were united in calling for a more immediate and humane response to the disappearance of young women along Highway 16. Participants expressed a need to be taken seriously when reporting the disappearance of young people. Lana Derrick (Terrace) and Alberta Williams (Prince Rupert), both of Gitanyow, were apparently abducted, and many family members are still waiting for news. The “not knowing” is very difficult for families; each year, the “wounds” are re-opened and there are “no answers” from the police. These survivors insisted on “action now!”

INCREASED YOUTH SUPPORT

A prevention theme that emerged was the support needed for vulnerable young people in rural and remote areas, both young women and young men.

In order to provide an effective response to the missing and murdered women of “The Highway of Tears,” attention must be paid to the youth of our region, as all of the victims mentioned in the

Highway of Tears Symposium Recommendations Report are between the ages of 14 and 25. Based on the collective experience of participants in anti-violence, counseling, policing, child protection, social work, education, probation and youth work, as well as in roles as chiefs, elders and family members of the victims, a number of needs were identified as not being adequately met in the communities of Smithers, Moricetown, Kitsumkalum, Kitselas, New Aiyansh, Gitanyow, Gitsegukla, Prince Rupert, Gitanmaax, Hagwilget, Glen Vowell and Kispiox. Although a number of concerns were raised, much of the emphasis was on youth-oriented efforts, so that no more young Aboriginal men and women are lost. The primary areas of need that were raised consistently from community to community include:

1. Improved, increased training for RCMP Officers as well as efforts to improve relationships between RCMP and young people
2. Education around safety and awareness for youth
3. More opportunities for healing and support for youth
4. Funding and long-term programming for youth
5. Increased awareness and vigilance around human trafficking
6. Reinforcement of “cultural identity” and “sense of belongingness”

It is important to understand that the youth referred to here are Aboriginal and that circumstances arising from the historical colonization of Aboriginal peoples have resulted in violence in the home, with some youth entering care or seeking refuge on the streets. Young adults are included in the definition of youth. Poverty, including lack of personal and community resources, is a structural issue that underlines all of the problems faced by Aboriginal peoples, in this case the Northwest of British Columbia. There must be an integrated approach to the issues faced by youth, including identity confirmation through historical and cultural teachings and educational and recreational opportunities.

The collective input indicates a need for a diverse approach to improving the holistic circumstances of young women in Northwest B.C. through the efforts of many different parts of our communities: RCMP, the youth themselves, First Nations Bands, service providers, schools and the government must support such efforts through programs and funding.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE RCMP WITH RESPECT TO YOUTH

In the view of the communities along Highway 16 in the Northwest, the RCMP needs to focus more energy in two areas: relationship-building with Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people, especially youth, and more advanced training and education about the factors contributing to the current circumstances of our communities. In particular, there was a noted lack of trust and respect between the RCMP and Aboriginal youth, which represents a fundamental barrier to effective relationships. Aboriginal community members suggested that this could be improved if officers spent time getting to know the young people, participating in and attending events at the schools, and working with chiefs, especially when young adults are having trouble with the law. There was even hope expressed that the RCMP could be involved in mentoring the youth.

To assist in this strengthening of relationships, many individuals expressed a need for training and understanding of youth issues. Particularly, the areas of child development and brain development

were repeatedly noted as important for RCMP Officers to better understand if they are to assist in creating safety for youth. In a related area, RCMP must also understand social issues of youth culture. Participants specifically mentioned the dynamics of the foster care system and its effects on youth, as well as other factors that lead young people to drugs and alcohol misuse. By extension, RCMP must understand how these experiences change the brain and affect the thinking of youth. It is believed that if the police officers better understand youth, then youth may turn to them when at risk.

YOUTH EDUCATION AND SAFETY

Beyond better education for RCMP officers, youth must also receive education around safety and awareness. The focus for youth was on personal safety and safety planning, specifically addressing hitchhiking, abduction, human trafficking, the internet and dangerous people. There was also some interest in the RCMP getting involved in this educational process so that youth get a sense that the police are concerned for and involved in their safety. Additionally, RCMP officers could potentially train young women in basic safety practices and self-defense. This education could happen in a variety of settings.

HEALING FOR PAST TRAUMA AND SUPPORT FOR HEALTHY BEHAVIOURS AND SAFE HOMES

Education about safety is important, but community healing must also take place in order to reduce the propensity for risky behavior. Many young people are growing up in families and communities still reeling from the effects of the residential school system and colonization, where addiction and abuse are prevalent. Teaching personal safety to young people who have little context for safety in their personal experience leaves a gap in their ability to value the education and adopt it in their own lives. Healing for all generations must take place first.

When the home does not represent a safe place, the youth often have no other options. Many communities are too small for a shelter and those that are large enough to have a transition house lack funding to house and support youth under 19. Currently, many young people have no supports in place if they get into trouble or have to run away. Creating a network of safe places for youth to spend the night and also be safe during the day may help to relieve the no-win decision of staying in an unsafe place or fleeing a community, by any means, no matter the risk.

Although some would suggest that these young people contact the police, due to the lack of trust and respect as well as a perception that young women are vulnerable to police harassment, sexual and otherwise, prevents this connection. Again, this underscores the need to build relationships so that the RCMP moves from a perceived threat to a position as mentors.

Beyond creating safety in times of crisis, there is also a demand for ongoing supports to be in place for youth. There is a noted gap in services to those youth, the majority of them Aboriginal, at age 19; this includes those who are leaving foster care and those currently in the foster care system. Many of these young people are in the system because they have experienced or witnessed traumatic events and require support in dealing with the consequences of the trauma as well as the disconnection from family. It was suggested that workshops and other forms of support could be put in place to help youth deal with trauma.

Young people from the Northwest communities, in general need better access to recreational activities that are healthy, which can divert them from alcohol and drug addictions. They need established support systems with healthy, positive role models who can help them feel connected to others and their Aboriginal heritage. These people could involve youth in activities that also connect them to their natural environment such as fishing, hunting, preserving foods, and participating in the clan and feast systems. Finally, the youth need viable means of supporting themselves financially so that they have the means to travel safely and avoid risky situations.

FUNDED YOUTH PROGRAMMING

There were many suggestions about creating programs for youth with a number of different focuses. Some people wanted to increase programming within schools; but no matter the venue, the need for funding for youth programs was emphasized. The focus of programs was on self-esteem, coping skills, violence, abuse and safety. Others suggested going further and working on developing leadership in the youth. A number of existing programs were touted as examples of work that could be continued in other communities, such as the Circle of Courage, Touch Stone and Roots of Empathy programs. Connecting youth with elders could be an important part of the programming, which could provide positive role models and education around roles and behavior. One of the more important areas of recommendations was to give youth a voice through a local youth forum and youth council, and through generally developing leadership in youth.

In summary, it is the goal of the Northwest participants that by strengthening understanding and building relationships between the RCMP and youth, and providing more education, support, healing and programming for youth, safety will become a reality in young women's lives in the Northwest. Many of the reasons why youth are at risk as well as the challenges in putting these recommendations into play relates to funding. We must be willing to put in place programs and people who will consistently provide support and work on fundamental issues for our communities in order to prevent future tragedy.

B. POLICE ISSUES; BUILDING STRONG POLICE - COMMUNITY RELATIONSHIPS

It is apparent that cultural discrepancies exist between RCMP and Aboriginal peoples. There is a long, mostly negative, history between the RCMP and Aboriginal communities, as the police enforced the law by returning Aboriginal children to the residential schools, where they often faced abuse, and enforced the *Indian Act* prohibition on traditional practices, such as the winter dancing by the Coast Salish and the Potlatch of the Northwest tribes. The follow up consultation participants collectively felt that the police used the North West as a training ground for their "rookies." They felt these trainees came with little knowledge of and held "fears" about Aboriginal peoples. As a result it was perceived that the police treatment, particularly of the youth, was physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually abusive. The Elders and grandparents want the violence by the police against the Aboriginal people to end and to be replaced by the building of a healthy, collaborative relationship between the police and the Aboriginal peoples and communities.

A sense of frustration and disappointment with Police response to reports of missing women, especially Aboriginal women, persisted. The RCMP (often referred to by participants as the “police”) are seen as the local representation of government authority, and the perception remains that the official response is lacking. Reports of missing women have been ignored, the responses to them delayed, or the efforts undertaken inadequate and too late. The police are not seen as a positive support for families with missing teenagers and young adults, as they generally do not respond immediately to missing persons reports, do not work with the family members in a coherent manner, do not follow up during the investigations of missing persons, and generally do not build positive and forward-moving relationships with Aboriginal people and communities in the Northwest. The victims’ families and communities want the police to be a positive presence in their communities. They would like to see police officers, particularly incoming ones new to the area, introduce themselves to Aboriginal communities and participate in community activities such as marches for missing women and anti-crime initiatives (for example, to prevent drunk driving) , as well as activities for youth, sports events and traditional feasts. They want the police to be approachable and interested in Aboriginal people.

Participants felt strongly that cultural competency training should be a part of education offered to police officers and updated on a regular basis up to two times per year. As a precaution or screening measure, police candidates should be required to undergo psychological examinations to ensure they have dealt with their own personal and power issues.

In keeping with the issue of the missing and murdered women along Highway of Tears the participants put forward the following discussion comments and recommendations for better police responses:

- When a missing person report is filed, the RCMP need to take action and start investigating immediately -- not 24 hours later. It does not matter who the missing person is or what background or community they are from – they should treat each one the same, with no double standards. For example, in the Northwest, little or no attention was given to the missing Aboriginal women on Highway 16 until Nicole Hoar⁹ went missing while actually hitch-hiking. Helicopters, search parties, posters, and so on were used on her behalf. Sadly she, too, is still missing.
- Train Aboriginal police and implement Aboriginal policing in the Northwest.
- Develop and train Aboriginal first responders to work in collaboration with RCMP on search, rescue and recovery and set-up protocols that will enable the response to missing persons to be immediate and appropriate.
- RCMP should distinguish each case individually and not lump all together.
- Use Aboriginal RCMP members to educate RCMP officers on appropriate Aboriginal culture and practice in the Northwest communities.
- Take action now and move forward from meetings and phone calls regarding missing teenagers and young women.
- Improve communications with the families of missing women as to the progress of investigations and follow up when RCMP promise to do so.

⁹ The first non-Aboriginal woman to go missing, who was tree-planting in the area.

- Mandatory cultural sensitivity/competency training and ongoing education for the RCMP regarding Aboriginal history and cultural practices.
- Mandatory training dealing with alcoholics, drug addicts, mental health and suicidal challenges and learning how to respond appropriately and setting up protocols with communities to respond in a timely manner
- Mandatory RCMP involvement with Aboriginal communities such as introducing themselves to leadership including Chiefs, council members and community resource people such as Health station staff. Also RCMP to participate in community activities such as anti-drinking & driving marches by school children, career day, mentorship to ensure they are an ongoing positive presence.
- Respond before a crime is discovered (i.e., take action immediately and presume that a crime may have been committed; do not wait to find a body).
- With collaboration, attitudes can change, relationships can be strengthened and best practices can be shared.

C. COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Participants as individuals and members of diverse Aboriginal communities want localized services such as a central dispatcher and/or resource person available to the victim families and communities. The participants want to be part of and approve the hiring of such an individual. The Northwest Contact person would liaise closely between the police and the Aboriginal communities to ensure the police are responding in accountable, proactive, collaborative manner regarding missing and murdered women.

The participants also made it very clear they want direct access to resources in the Northwest rather than through Prince George, BC. Prince Rupert participants felt strongly about this, as they felt the involvement of the Prince George community and policing services ends in Terrace, B.C.

For healing and reconciliation purposes the participants want to develop positive relationships with the police and work on a partnership basis to resolve social problems in their communities particularly dealing with youth.

Consultation participants realized that some of the most important actions to prevent ongoing disappearance of teenagers and young women must begin in their own communities, with their own efforts. Many recommendations concerned prevention or better emergency response measures and community activities. Practical strategies included:

- Heightened awareness – posters, social media, school workshops on “abduction awareness”
- Encourage and groom young people to become police – also introduce Aboriginal policing in the Northwest
- Promotional campaigns to educate the young people
- Pay phones available in communities with 911 connection

- Contingency funds for emergency travel, in order that youth will not hitchhike
- Better transportation information and schedules about public transportation
- Better care for marginalized – hospice/transition house availability for homeless/distressed women (even while under influence)
- Local emergency calls-local dispatcher/coordinator in the Northwest

The Northwest Aboriginal communities and victims' families see themselves as absolutely integral to the police ongoing investigations of missing and murdered women. The communities are prepared to collaborate with the police in all areas such as safety of their members, transportation, and so on.

D. HEALING AND RECONCILIATION

The Aboriginal concept of reconciliation is key to understanding the aftermath of the missing women and the impact of their disappearances on communities. The importance of healing and how central these values are in the Northwest cultures should not be underestimated.

Feelings of anger and helplessness persist in individuals and families because most of the missing women have never been found. In most cases, there is not even any strong evidence from which to draw conclusions that would help to resolve the questions and anguish of the remaining family and friends. Aboriginal culture emphasizes recognition of death, loss and closure, and follows certain rites and customs which have not been possible in these circumstances.

For Aboriginal communities, the experience of losing their young women inflicts a deep trauma. All of the Aboriginal groups in the Northwest are matrilineal – women are seen as the ones who carry the culture, history and lineage forward; they play an important role in continuity. The women pass down the family history, stories, and songs from generation to generation. This history stays strong through the women and keeps the family unity alive. As a result every member of the Aboriginal communities knows who they are and where they come from. When a woman is lost there is a disruptive ripple throughout the clan and nation. As a result, there is a wound that does not heal, and many generations lose their sense of belonging.¹⁰

Northwest communities are close-knit units; and the loss of a community member is everyone's loss; these young women have been daughters, mothers, sisters, and friends of the people remaining. To help resolve such deep losses, the traumatic experience has to be acknowledged and grieved, with community members coming to acceptance gradually and incorporation of the life lessons that have been gained. The following recommendations were made to help communities move forward:

¹⁰ Heather Ann Harris, *12,000 Years of History: Oral History, Indigenous Knowledge and Ways of Knowing in Northwestern North America* (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Alberta, 2003).

- Counselling for survivors
- Community support networks
- Rites, memorials, and ways of remembering the missing

It was also suggested that there be a quilt or collage created to represent and honour each of the women missing on the Highway of Tears. A project to memorialize the women in this way could also aid with community healing.

IV. RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations and submissions were presented by all the groups/individuals contacted and dealt with issues flowing from the discussion points. Below is a summary of the main recommendations. While many of the recommended actions are interrelated, the major recommendations are identified under each of the major themes.

A. ENSURING THE SAFETY OF VULNERABLE WOMEN AND PREVENTING VIOLENCE AGAINST ABORIGINAL AND RURAL WOMEN

- Set up and implement training programs regarding personal awareness and safety for the schools, families, women's groups and communities throughout the Northwest.
- Develop and encourage family and community-based safety networks, where individuals connect through social networking about missing persons, for example, to report a sighting of an at-risk youth or a young woman.
- Give public notice to all levels of government that missing and murdered women are not an Aboriginal problem, but a societal problem, that must be addressed with joint efforts.
- Hold a separate inquiry for the Northwest, along the Highway of Tears.
- For personal safety and awareness, present Hitchhiking Workshops in schools with women speakers and RCMP.

B. POLICE ISSUES; BUILDING STRONG POLICE - COMMUNITY RELATIONSHIPS

- It should be mandatory that police respond immediately to a report of a missing child or woman.
- Those police conducting searches and investigations must keep the lines of communication open with the relatives of persons reported missing.
- Promote and train more Aboriginal people to participate in the justice system, particularly as police officers.
- Education and Cross Cultural Sensitivity Training should be mandatory for police officers working in the Northwest.
- Ensure accountability among police and governments to restore trust in law and justice re: missing women.
- Preventive measures such as an undercover officer to work the highway hitchhiking.
- Develop and teach a process for responding to traumatic incidents on reserve.

- Recommend zero tolerance for racism; police candidates should be screened for attitudes and issues re: power and authority.

C. COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

- Mayors, Chiefs, provincial and federal governments, and the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal public have a responsibility to partner and find resolutions to the situation of ongoing missing and murdered women.
- Provide a local dispatcher in the Northwest communities, not located in Prince George, who can immediately connect people to police ambulance, a hospital, family members as needed.
- Incorporate Citizens on Patrol and include Highway Maintenance crews to help and inform local authorities on high-risk behaviours or suspicious persons/activity.
- Missing persons laminated poster for "Highway of Tears" with profile and call number at every truck stop, rest stop, Information Centre, community events, and council meetings.
- Create a team of First Responders in every community, including Aboriginal people, firemen, hunters, trappers, and fisherman, and develop protocols with local search and rescue teams and police to enable immediate action where appropriate.

In addition, the geographic isolation and unique history of the Northwest require:

- Aboriginal-specific relationships to be developed within their own communities and with the RCMP.
- Effective lines of communication to be established between Aboriginal communities and RCMP.
- Aboriginal peoples within their communities to be properly trained as first responders and to collaborate with RCMP regarding search and rescue protocols in the communities.
- Appropriate guidelines and resources to be available in the communities to support these services.
- Provide appropriate equipment, supports and education necessary for community based policing can be an effective way of addressing the medical, psycho-social, and spiritual needs of the community members.

D. HEALING AND RECONCILIATION

- Establish a designated day to mourn the loss of the missing and murdered women in Canada.

- Publish short stories, develop a traveling exhibit of the missing women for Northern communities.
- RCMP can build better relationships with elders, communities, and have more involvement in local activities; become positive role models for youth.
- Provide victim services for the families of the missing women.
- Counseling and education for young people, especially troubled young people.
- In discussions, it became clear that those who have lost young people along Highway 16 want to preserve the memory of their loved ones. "We are their voice". One way of doing so would be a community art project, in which a quilt or collage is designed for each missing woman.

V. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR MOVING FORWARD

In addition to the recommendations put forth above by participants in the follow up consultations, there are a number of themes that deserve additional treatment.

Many participants expressed an ongoing sense of anger and disappointment. There is continued frustration that nothing seems to have been done by the authorities who are there expressly to serve and protect. The losses and intergenerational impacts on family and survivors should not be underestimated, by RCMP or other government entities. Acknowledgement by the RCMP of their failure to catch the persons who have abducted the missing young women and an apology to the families would help to move on to a new phase of mutual collaboration.

There are hopeful signs in the recommendations for the community to take responsibility and take action where it can to protect its young people. The greatest need is for a compassionate and caring treatment of those individuals and communities that have experienced such losses. The communities and the world at large must develop and treat the vulnerable young people with respect and support in moving forward in their lives. Aboriginal communities must take the lead in improving the circumstances of their young people, to value them. These efforts can facilitate the building of more inclusive communities, and genuine collaboration can take root and grow into rich, fluid and healthy communities.

A step toward healing and reconciliation has been taken with the work of these consultations, but must not be allowed to stop here. More work has to be done. The diverse communities, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, must grow together through understanding, compassion and caring for each other, to create a safer and more responsive society.

PERSONAL REFLECTIONS: LINDA LOCKE (SYAMSTAWEL)

“Remember that ‘woman hold up half the sky’ and misogyny and murder of women anywhere is a crime against humanity.”

- Michael Enright, Journalist/Writer, CBC, June 17, 2012.

For myself, the experience of these consultations has been a process of discovery, and quite rewarding both personally and professionally. It has been a privilege to participate in the work of the Missing Women’s Commission and to provide the Northwestern perspective on the tragic circumstances of the missing and murdered women who once lived in this region.

I’ve been honored to hear and speak with those who have come forward to participate in the consultation meetings. They have demonstrated real generosity of spirit. Participants were honest and direct about the trauma of their losses and the impact on families and communities. At the same time, cautious elements of hope appeared, a determination to prevent this situation in the

future. I believe there is a willingness to begin building and rebuilding safer communities, where people are more aware, and better able to protect and support their youth.

Part of the forward progression rests with the Aboriginal communities and part rests with others. I discovered that there are Aboriginal people who want to collaborate and work with the police to create safe and harmonious communities, despite the negative experiences of the past.

The Northwest consultations have played an important role in beginning the work of healing and reconciliation so valued by the Aboriginal culture. By providing a forum, space for the voices of those who have lost loved ones, a step has been taken toward recognizing, and eventually resolving, the related cultural and psychological issues. There is much work ahead, but the process has started – the Aboriginal communities of the Northwest are willing to go forward and create a safer community for their women and children. We remember these women, and we resolve to do better to prevent Aboriginal and rural women from falling through the cracks of our public safety net.

ABORIGINAL VOICES: LITERATURE, POETRY, SPIRIT OF LOSS AND HOPE

From the “Prayer Book” of Dr. M. Jane Smith (Xsiwis), a Gitxsan Elder who kindly presented the following prayer for the Missing Women Commission Inquiry Report:

When my spirit flees to a desolate place
Draw me out and take me to the stars.

When my spirit wanders in the dark of night
Give me the morning light.

When my spirit cries in a barren land
Carry me to the banks of the River.

When my spirit crouches in the midst of jagged rocks
Fly me to the green of the mountain.

When my spirit drifts to the burnt out wilderness
Transport me to the dancing cedar trees.

When my spirit is caught among the thorns
Lift me up with the flight of the eagle.

When my spirit is thrust into a raging storm
Bring me back with the laughter of children.

Oh come Great Spirit and heal my broken spirit.

The following poem by Pansy Wright-Simms, who works with children, serves as a welcome to the children of the Gitxsan:

“Love me Unconditionally”

I’m your child
 A true blessing from above.
 The Creator put me before you
 To teach you Unconditional love.
 I may not be perfect,
 But who on this earth is?
 I have these behaviours,
 At times I don’t understand
 please don’t turn your back on me
 I need your Loving Hands.
 I’m sorry that I will ever hurt you
 that isn’t my intent
 I’m going through many motions in life.
 I don’t know where the times went.
 Don’t try to understand me
 Embrace me for whom I am
 When the water stops flowing,
 and creates an enormous damn
 I pray you’ll be there
 through all my trials and tribulations
 to assist me from the Jamn.
 Remember I have no control
 Of my life that’s destined to be.
 My experiences and lessons in Life
 Will be learned most importantly by me.
 I know you are my parents and
 You want the best for me
 For what it’s worth,
 Through the Good Times and Bad Times
 I Beg you to Love me Unconditionally.

In Recognition of our Majagalee
 “Flowers of the Earth”

The following poem was written by a young Aboriginal woman, Fawn Wright, and expresses the distress of many of the young people:

The enigmas submerging
 From the depths of my mind
 Attacking the fortress
 Surrounding my heart
 the segments fall from the wall
 collapsing upon my soul
 releasing pressure on these stubborn
 dry eyes
 I notice!
 Fortitude is dissolving from my spirit
 Cowardly leaving me astray
 Faltering to my knees, I scream
 I WILL NOT CRY!
 Excruciating drops fall from each eye
 Weakness is showing
 I dare not...

Pansey Wright-Simms reflects some of her own experience, providing the following poem as a gift to someone going through hardship:

“Eliminate Fear”

Hush be Quiet
 You are seen and not be heard
 Don't look at me that way
 Don't you whisper a single word.

I think back and wish...
 I could have said a thousand words or more
 Not worrying consistently
 About the slam of the cellar door.

I have learned a lot over the years
 To let my voice be known
 The constant pins and needles felt in my heart
 Will now and forever be shown.

Sure it will be a struggle to
 Speak the silent thoughts
 But my strength and determination
 Will assist me in all that I have sought.

Listen to your heart...
 Are words I often share with others
 Your feelings are significant
 An important lesson I've learned being a mother.

Eliminate your fears
 Allow your voice to be heard
 Face them with courage & with pride
 Remember, the Almighty Creator
 Is standing by your side.

This poem urges people to have courage and speak out as the participants did in the consultations.

Pansy Wright-Simms also provided the following poem reflecting the death of someone close and the feelings that arose as a result of the loss:

“Only Time Can Tell”

Only time can tell
 When broken hearts will heal
 Numbness right now is all we'll really feel.
 We don't understand why life passes us by,
 One minute we are laughing,
 The next breath we will cry.
 Our loved ones have struggled so hard on this Earth
 Working so hard to touch hearts in a good way
 Feels like we're biding with time each & every day.
 I guess we will never know
 When our job here is done,
 There's only one mover and shaker,
 He is the “Almighty One”.
 I really don't feel we were meant to understand
 I suppose that is why there's only “one set of footprints in the sand”
 Sometimes it feels as though we are alone in despair
 But we look up and glance around and
 We're surrounded by family and friends that care
 So we pick ourselves up and
 Walk another day on this Earth,
 Soon our loved ones will come back through a new birth.
 Imagine all of their hurts in the past, Gone with that life
 And Anew is delivered to us in a flash.
 Only Time Can Tell
 How we'll make it through this one,
 Our Journey's through life will never be done!
 In memory of...

Part of the healing and reconciliation that needs to take place for all peoples is between the male and female energies. To further this process, a poem by a male Elder, Ken N. Mowatt is included in these writings:

The spreading of the wings, the spirit in flight
Several paling moons, the journey has seen
From the fragile forest, a kindred sings
The breath of the spirit is strong...
The spirit lives on.
I am eternal...Hey...hey...hey

Mas liki'insxw

VI. APPENDICES

DISCUSSION QUESTIONNAIRE

The following questions, taken from the Policy Forum booklets for Forums 1, 3 and 7, formed the basis for discussion during the consultations.

Ensuring the Safety of Vulnerable Women – *Preventing Violence Against Aboriginal and Rural Women*

- Which crime prevention and early intervention models, strategies and techniques should be adopted by police in BC in order to better protect Aboriginal and rural women?
- How can Aboriginal and rural women be involved in the design, implementation and evaluation of initiatives to enhance their protection from violent crime?
- How can Aboriginal and rural communities be involved in the design, implementation and evaluation of initiatives to improve police-community relations and improve police protection of vulnerable women?
- How can police restore and/or establish good relations with Aboriginal and rural communities where missing women investigations are perceived as being or having been ineffective?
- Which procedures or protocols should be adopted by police in BC in order to facilitate the investigation of violent crimes against Aboriginal and rural women?
- What are the connections between missing women in the urban and rural contexts? What crime prevention strategies can be designed to take this relationship into account?

Building Strong Police-Community Relationships

- Would enhanced community policing models and methods increase police effectiveness in protecting vulnerable and marginalized women? If so, what changes would be effective?
- Are the existing, conventional or historic strategies to combat racism and sexism in policing sufficient? Or is more required to ensure that police can effectively protect vulnerable and marginalized women? If so, what strategies should be implemented?
- Should provincial policing standards on the roles and responsibilities of police officers be amended to more specifically recognize the right to equal protection? If so, what should the standards include?
- Should police forces change the way diverse police officers are deployed in order to more effectively protect vulnerable and marginalized women? If so, how?

Improving Missing Person Practices – *Police Relationships with Victims’ Families, the Community, the Public and the Media*

- What steps can be taken to ensure that all individuals who report a person as missing are treated fairly and with equal respect? How can we remove obstacles to a fair and equal response in each missing person case?
- What are the specific information and communication needs of families and friends who have reported someone missing?
- What mechanisms or processes are required to ensure that these needs are met in an effective manner?
- What steps need to be taken to build an effective network of support for families and friends of missing persons? What types of support are required? Who should provide these supports? How should they be provided?
- How can police-community partnerships be developed and used effectively in both prevention and investigation efforts in the context of missing persons—particularly vulnerable and marginalized women who face a high risk of going missing?
- How can we best use websites and social media to provide information and increase public awareness about missing persons? How can these tools/strategies be used in prevention efforts? How can these tools/strategies be used to facilitate the missing person investigation process?
- What steps can be taken to build community skills and community engagement in missing person investigations?
- Are different strategies required in the urban and rural contexts? What steps can be taken to foster positive bystander attitudes, engagement and intervention skills?
- Should police agencies develop specific media protocols to deal with missing person investigations? If so, what best practices should be included in these protocols? What resources do families, friends and community groups need to support their interactions with the media in this context?
- Should the media be encouraged to develop standards for reporting in missing person cases? If so, what steps can be taken to initiate this process?
- What types of capacity building and support are required at the national level? What are the priority requirements and how can they be met? Could the National Police Support Centre for Missing Persons carry out these functions? Are there other organizations that could carry out these functions?

From Report to Substantive Change – Healing, Reconciliation and Implementation

- Are restorative justice measures required to improve the relationship between police and community members in communities that have been particularly affected such as the Downtown Eastside or along the Highway of Tears? If so, what types of measures could be developed and implemented?
- Do steps need to be taken for further public acknowledgment of the tragedy of missing and murdered women? If so, what types of steps?
- Should progress in meeting the recommendations set out in the report be measured and evaluated? If so, what steps should be taken to measure and evaluate change?
- What types of best practices for initiating, sustaining and managing change processes should be integrated into the Commission report?

MAP OF BC AND THE NORTHWEST



Source: Natural Resources Canada: The Atlas of Canada, online:

http://atlas.nrcan.gc.ca/site/english/maps/reference/provincesterritories/british_columbia/map.jpg