

A new spin on spotting sex offenders

Technology, intelligence and enforcement combined

BY JOANNA BURGESS

E Division's violent sexual offenders have met their match.

Sexual predators in B.C. are being hit with the one-two punch of ISPOT and ISPIN. The Integrated Sexual Predator Information Network (ISPIN) and the Integrated Sexual Predator Observation Team are great examples of integrated and intelligence-led policing.

"It's a new era," says S/Sgt Matt Logan, the RCMP's only operational psychologist. Logan works in E Division's Behavioural Sciences Group (BSG) and played a lead role in the creation of ISPIN.

Logan got the idea for ISPIN after attending a provincial Crown Counsel conference where he learned about the province's database with the names of 1,200 high-risk sexual offenders under consideration for dangerous offender status.

BSG got permission to tap into the province's files to use the information to help police. The group built an assessment template using key factors that connect sexual violence such as psychopathy, deviant arousal, low impulse control, previous violence, sadistic elements, and the offender's immediate environment. The assessment tool was then used to assess the level of dangerousness of the sexual offenders obtained from the Crown counsel database. Each offender has been given a score from one to 10 — the higher the score, the more likely that individual will commit further sexually violent crimes.

This process produced a list of about 300 offenders who scored a 7.5 or higher and a list of the top five per cent of high-risk offenders — 48 people who scored 9 to 9.5. "These are the Clifford Olsons types" says S/Sgt Scot Filer, operational NCO of E Division Behavioural Sciences Group and to whom the ISPOT reports. "Twenty-six of them are active in the community."

I-spy

The ISPOT team utilizes the ISPIN's intelligence files to direct its operations. "ISPIN prioritizes the list of offenders and provides ISPOT with an intelligence-led target selection process. Our file intake protocol allows us to make an informed decision about what we work on" Filer says. The ISPOT team will monitor the activities of high-risk sexual offenders, watching for any parole or probation breaches or any signs the offender is on the verge of re-offending. The team also provides investigation and enforcement support for the field.

The ISPOT concept developed when E Division ran three pilot projects targeting high-risk sex offenders beginning in 2000. "It was very successful. We made a lot of arrests, forwarded charges and secured convictions," Filer says. "As a result we obtained the support for dedicated resources to put together a full-time team."

The team was finalized in September 2005 and hit the streets this past December. Sgt Tom Kurucz heads up the nine person team which spent the first few months training.

The team is a mix of experienced investigators and fresh faces from the RCMP, Vancouver and Victoria police services. "We've really hit the ground running," Kurucz says. He says ISPOT has targeted and arrested 15 offenders as of February 2006.

ISPOT also trains and partners with BSG's Integrated Child Exploitation (ICE) team since both units often deal with similar crimes and criminals. ISPOT and ICE team members are interchangeable, providing additional resources for each other's work when needed.

BSG will do a six month review with the team and management to see how things have been going. "The team is still growing and developing. We have to wait and let it run and then fine tune," Kurucz says. The review will help with the mobilizing of a second ISPOT team that BSG hopes to have in place sometime this year.

One area where Kurucz says he wants ISPOT to play a role in, is participating in the Division's child abduction response plan. When a child goes missing, using the information they have acquired on high-risk offenders could be an important factor. "Knowing the locations that these guys frequent and who is out there, can assist us with decision making in terms of where to look and who to prioritize on the list of suspects."

Info and insight

Along with the rating system, ISPIN also holds almost everything ever written about the list of high-risk offenders. From this information a Sexual Predator Intelligence Report (SPIR) is compiled. A SPIR is a summary of all the network's data - probation reports, sentencing reports, psychological or psychiatric evaluations, correctional plans, even the names of people who visit the offender in jail.

"Those documents are valuable," Kurucz says. "It really gives you insight into who and what these guys are." A SPIR also provides recommendations for interviews, interrogations, undercover operations and hostage or barricade situations.

BSG provides copies of the SPIR's or the information within to investigators, probation or parole officers, the parole board and judges so that they can make informed release or sentencing decisions.

"Originally we dreamt of affecting sentencing by providing intelligence-led, research-based evidence to the courts," Logan says. "Judges have been really enthused about having this kind of information because it will help them to do a better job. They'll worry less about appeals because the evidence they have to back up their decisions is solid."

Logan says that offenders have been receiving the full two-to-three year sentences for breaches thanks to the ISPIN data and the evidence gathered by ISPOT. "The researchers are happy too because we're putting wheels on what they've been doing all this time," he says. "We're

operationalizing the research that's out there. I haven't seen anything like this and I've been [in the force] for 26 years.”

ISPIN is also equipped with an electronic mapping feature. Any location associated to a high-risk offender or locations they are known to frequent are entered on the map. If a person is abducted, the last seen location can be mapped and locations associated to high-risk offenders can be viewed to determine any geographic relationships. This could lead to suspect prioritization.

Logan says that he one day hopes to take the information about where these high-risk offenders have lived and existed for the past several years and create a timeline to see if there are any links between where they've been and any unsolved homicides or major sexual offences.

E Division is now taking the premise of ISPIN and creating templates to determine the top five percent of criminals responsible for the majority of other crimes such as robbery, break and enters, fraud and domestic violence — part of the division's crime reduction initiative.

Logan is also helping develop a template to compile a list of individuals who pose the greatest danger to criminal justice officials. “This will bring the Rozkos to our attention,” says Logan. “I've vowed that I'm not going to retire until we own these guys.”

Strong support

Logan, Filer and Kurucz all say the feedback they've been getting from municipal partners, justice officials as well as Corrections Services Canada and B.C. Corrections workers has been positive.

They attribute a lot of ISPO and ISPIN's success to their collaboration with corrections workers. BSG has a corrections liaison person working in their unit. “They're the ones who know right away whether this person is coming unglued,” Kurucz says. “Before, Corrections didn't have anyone to lean on, especially when they knew these guys were about to go off.”

The combination of technology, commitment and partnerships within BSG makes pursuing high-risk sexual offenders that much more comprehensive. BSG's expertise is world-class and available to all detachments in the Pacific Region. “I don't think anyone else in the country or world can provide the services or has the diversity of services that we do,” Filer says.