

# Police accused of verbal assault during training session on missing, murdered Indigenous women

'What do we do when we're sending women in to do training on race relations and they feel violated?'

By Jody Porter, [CBC News](#) Posted: Sep 13, 2016 7:00 AM ET Last Updated: Sep 14, 2016 11:47 AM ET



The Walk a Mile film about missing and murdered Indigenous women was used as part of a training session with Thunder Bay police in July. (Thunderstone Pictures)

Police officers in Thunder Bay, Ont., are being accused of verbally assaulting a facilitator who was delivering cross-cultural training on Indigenous issues, but a city official says it was all a misunderstanding.

"It just got really bad," said the facilitator, whom CBC News has agreed not to name because she fears that speaking out could have implications for her employment.

**'The behaviour was really ridiculous.'** - cultural training facilitator

Thunder Bay trains local volunteers who are paid an honorarium to conduct training sessions for all city staff, including first responders such as police.

Police officers were "disruptive and dismissive" throughout the session, she said. They made a joke out of a question about what it would be like to have a child taken away to residential school. One officer twirled her hair while others spun around in their chairs during a discussion on genocide, the facilitator said.

The incident allegedly happened in July during a training session using the Walk a Mile film series, a project that aims to bring local Indigenous history and concerns to a mainstream audience.

After the film about missing and murdered Indigenous women "the behaviour was really ridiculous," she said.

Officers accused her of lying about the statistics and asked her for proof of differential police treatment of Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, she said. That's when she shut down the session.

"I had this assault happen to me and I still haven't been invited to the table to receive an apology or to be told how it was resolved," she said.

The filmmaker behind Walk a Mile is now concerned about how the national public inquiry on missing and murdered Indigenous women will deal with allegations of racism among police.



'What do we do when it's the police who are making statements that have great impact on our safety?' asks filmmaker Michelle Derosier. (Michelle Derosier)

"What do we do when we're sending in women to do training on race relations and they feel violated? What do we do when it's the police who are making statements that have great impact on our safety?" said Michelle Derosier.

Thunder Bay police did not respond to questions from CBC News about their cross-cultural training in general or this session specifically.

But discussions with the senior police training officers in the session have taken place, according to city clerk John Hannam, whose office promotes the Walk a Mile project.

## Trainer 'misinterpreted' police response

The facilitator "misinterpreted" the police response, he said. For example, police were laughing at a "sidebar conversation" during the session, "not really about the film at all."

Furthermore, Hannam said the timing of the session was bad for police.



Police were laughing at a 'sidebar conversation' during a cross-cultural training film and 'not really about the film at all,' according to Thunder Bay city clerk John Hannam. (City of Thunder Bay)

"It happened during a week when there was an attack on police in the United States and six or seven officers were murdered and so there may have been some heightened sensitivity over that," he said.

Eight police officers were killed in attacks in Dallas, Texas, and Baton Rouge, La., in July.

It's estimated that at least 1,200 Indigenous women have disappeared or been killed in Canada since 1980.

Derosier said she is heartbroken and disturbed that police would violate the spirit of the films that share a "sacred story" of a First Nations woman whose murder in Thunder Bay remains unsolved.

- **INTERACTIVE| [Missing and Murdered: The Unsolved Cases of Indigenous Women and Girls](#)**
- **MMIW inquiry announced**

"This is part of a bigger narrative that is happening in this country around police and the police state and the relationship to Indigenous women," she said. "How do we reach true reconciliation when these things are allowed to happen and there's not community response and action?"

Derosier is calling for a public review of the city's use of Walk a Mile, including a public review of the training conducted with police.