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Understanding the North Preston's Finest gang linked in deaths of Calgary girl, her mother

Gang has been active in drugs, prostitution since the 1990s

Q&A

Dave Dormer · [CBC News](#) July 21, 2016



Edward Downey, 46, is accused of first-degree murder in the deaths of Sara Baillie and Taliyah Marsman.

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Accused killer Edward Downey has ties to North Preston's Finest, a gang based in Nova Scotia known for recruiting girls and women in the Maritimes and forcing them to work as prostitutes across the country.

Downey used to live in the Halifax area. He is charged with first-degree murder in the deaths of Sara Baillie and her daughter, Taliyah Marsman. Funerals for the victims will be held Thursday.

The 46-year-old also has a lengthy criminal record in Alberta, with convictions for drug trafficking and possession of a firearm. He was also convicted of aiding someone to engage in prostitution.

Few people in Calgary had heard of North Preston's Finest prior to this case making headlines, so to provide added understanding of who they are and how they operate, Angela MacIvor — an investigative reporter with CBC Halifax who has covered the gang for several years — spoke to the [*Calgary Eyeopener*](#).

- [Edward Downey, charged in death of Taliyah Marsman, has Halifax ties](#)
- [Edward Downey a career criminal who was violent against women, parole documents show](#)

Q: *What can you tell us about this gang North Preston's Finest?*

A: It's a gang based out of North Preston, that's a community located about 20 minutes outside Halifax and it is a black community. I know that may sound odd to say in 2016, how can we identify a community as one race, but North Preston is in a bit of a unique situation because it's where a lot of black settlers were given land 200 years ago. I'm only saying this for context because North Preston is a very close-knit community, families have been there for generations. And there are basically two streets with around 2,000 people. There are no businesses there, which really means no opportunities. What ends up happening is many people in the community, sadly, end up getting involved in gangs.

Q: *Can you tell us about the gang's history?*

A: North Preston's Finest, they're also known as NPF — that's usually how we refer to them here, they've

been in operation since the early '90s and police in Toronto really exposed their operations way back then after officers in downtown Toronto were talking to girls on the streets back in '91 and '92 who said they were from Nova Scotia and were being held against their will by pimps. So police started investigating that and they traced the prostitution ring and found out a few of the leaders were based here in North Preston and ended up putting them in prison.

Taliyah Marsman, left, and Sara Baillie. Police have accused Edward Downey, 46, of first-degree murder in their deaths. (Instagram)

Q: *How do they recruit their members, both men and women?*

A: They're able to recruit men, and I should say young boys, because it's really an easy way to make money. When these young boys see their brothers or cousins rolling into the community ... from Toronto or Calgary or wherever they happen to be living, and they come into North Preston with their luxury cars, the big chains around their neck worth \$100,000, it's tempting. As for women, there are women in the community who become part of the gang through affiliation, through family, but it is mostly led by the men.

Q: *But there are women who get involved in it as prostitutes?*

A: Yes, a lot sadly. What happens is they end up recruiting young women and girls, and I'm talking girls as young as 13, 14, 15 years old. What they do is convince them to sell their bodies for sex. What it usually starts out as is what's called the "boyfriend technique." That's when one of these pimps makes their target feel like they're in a relationship. They make them feel special, they buy them jewelry, take them to the spa, out to dinner, but then what they do is take them out of their comfort zone, away from their family, usually out of the province ... then the abuse starts and that's when the death threats start. So these pimps are really master manipulators in the sense that they target the most vulnerable, usually girls living in group homes or runaways, then they get them into a situation they can't get out of.

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