



# Meet the Guys Who Want to Launch a Catalogue of Canadian Police Abuses

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By Tyler Dawson

Bad cops might pop up in the media now and again, but two men are looking to create a website that would document every instance of police misconduct in Canada, which they believe has become endemic.

Darryl Davies, a professor of criminology at Carleton University, and *Ottawa Life* magazine publisher Dan Donovan, have launched a [Kickstarter campaign](#), hoping to raise \$75,000 to create and fund [www.PoliceMisconductCanada.com](http://www.PoliceMisconductCanada.com).

The fundraiser, which began a few weeks ago and runs until January 3, comes in the aftermath of a Quebec police officer getting away with [killing a five-year-old boy](#) in a car crash. He was travelling more than double the posted speed limit and in the midst of a [high-speed surveillance operation](#).

Similar reporting endeavours exist elsewhere: the CATO Institute, a libertarian think tank in the United States, operates the [National Police Misconduct Reporting Project](#), which curates nasty cop news from around the U.S. and shares it online.

Davies and Donovan's fundraiser—the product of more than a year of planning—appears to be the first project in Canada aimed solely at keeping the public abreast of complaints against police countrywide. The website would be maintained by law and sociology students, and cover all manner of misconduct, from police brutality to Charter rights violations that are raised in court. Importantly, it will track cases as they go through the courts or police disciplinary system, and keep track of punishments and consequences.

"It speaks to the whole issue of public confidence in policing in Canada," Davies explained. "Police make mistakes like in any other occupation. However, when they make mistakes, the consequences can be pretty significant for people involved—like, they can be dead."

Over the past few years, there have been a number of extremely high-profile allegations of police misconduct in Canada. The unprecedented mass arrests at the 2010 G20 in Toronto, for example, or the shooting death of Sammy Yatim, also in Toronto. But there are several others: the death of Polish immigrant Robert Dziekanski more than a half-decade ago in the Vancouver airport; police crackdowns on student protests in Montreal; and in Ottawa, the alleged sexual assault of Stacy Bonds while she was in police custody.

While these might normally just be headlines to many readers, Davies believes Canadian cops have reached something of a peak of bad behaviour that's fostered by rotten police culture. It's not just a few cities, either. These sorts of events, he said, are happening across the country.

A few provinces do have police oversight systems—Ontario has the Office of the Independent Police Review Director, which manages complaints about police, and the Special Investigations Unit, which can charge cops with crimes. Alberta has the similarly focused Alberta Serious Incident Response Team.

But the existence of these units doesn't mean they're up to snuff. Critics charge that convictions are rare, and that punishments meted out to officers aren't nearly harsh enough.

"They are whitewashing investigations, they are not being held accountable, and the public, in many cases individual victims, are paying the price for it," Donovan said.

Unsurprisingly, police don't see it this way.

Matt Skof, the president of the Ottawa Police Association (who has [feuded publicly](#) with Davies in the past) said the project is "disingenuous."

"We have, already, many layers of oversight in place," said Skof. "They're well within their rights to create another website. It just seems pretty superfluous."

The goal of the website is to raise public awareness of the problems within policing so Canadians will force politicians to change the oversight system. Donovan, reached by phone in Toronto, said the website is adamantly not anti-cop—in fact, it's meant to improve policing through improved oversight.

"It will ensure that bad eggs in the police, the ones that are taking advantage of the system, are held to account," Donovan said, noting that he comes from a policing family. His dad was a cop for more than three decades.

The narrative of bad cops infecting the police system, though, isn't one that police unions take kindly to. Skof denied there is any sort of widespread police misconduct in the country, and said the website proposal highlights specific incidents while ignoring the broader scope of policing in the country.

"That's also in itself an incredible exaggeration; there are hundreds of thousands of interactions with the public every year in each city," Skof said. "(They're) glossing over the fact that there's many, many positive interactions with the public, and yet they've chosen not to mention that."

Donovan says his magazine has been covering police misconduct for a few years, and they regularly hear from readers with their own stories about interacting with police. But good interactions with police don't necessarily negate the bad apples, he said.

"For all the cases of police malfeasance, there's 50 or 60 or 70 or more where there's not that problem, but what we're saying is that in the cases—and the growing cases where there are [allegations of police misconduct]—they need to be dealt with transparently, they need to be dealt with firmly and there needs to be consequences," Donovan said.

Within police forces across the country there is, undeniably, a certain culture that simply comes with the job, and whether or not the culture has turned is hotly debated. In Davies's view, this culture is a toxic one, and it manifests itself not just in instances of police misconduct, but also in several other problems, such as police mental health and suicide, and domestic problems for officers.

"It's not a healthy environment. If it's not a healthy environment, who in their right mind would think, therefore, they would police in a healthy manner?"

Skof disagreed.

"That's an absolutely farcical and absurd statement for him to make," Skof told VICE. "Police culture is a professional culture, it's been like that for many decades, and it's going to continue to be that, due to the fact that we have oversight that we accept and we hire professional officers to do the work the public expects of us."

Of course, the issue—if indeed there is an issue, which is plainly disputed by police—is far more complicated than bad cops and police oversight. Donovan highlighted concerns over the testosterone-charged recruitment of officers; Davies suggested police aren't getting enough training in de-escalation and order management (after all, the vast majority of complaints are about police rudeness and brusqueness, and not about being bludgeoned by a truncheon).

All of this has, in recent years, become tangled up in a major debate in North America about policing.

Ideally, Donovan said, this website will help improve accountability and help the good cops who are stuck in the system. If the funding is secured, the website will go live around March 2015.

"If people from across the country, Joe and Jane Regular, everyday citizens, say 'this is important, we're going to send 5, 10 or \$20 to this thing,' it gives it serious, serious authority from the public, it gives a serious engaged representation and legitimacy that will make it worthwhile."