

Historical sexual abuse charges filed against B.C. minister belonging to church with no name

Complainant says she is speaking out about what happened in 1989 to protect others



[Karin Larsen](#) · CBC News · Posted: Mar 08, 2024 6:00 AM CST | Last Updated: March 8



Members of a Christian sect with no official name but commonly referred to as the 2x2s attend a gospel meeting in Port Coquitlam, B.C., on Sunday, March 3. (Ben Nelms/CBC)

A Vancouver Island woman is speaking out about the alleged sexual abuse she suffered as a teenager while a member of an insular and secretive Christian sect that has no official name, but is most commonly called the Two-by-Twos, or 2x2s.

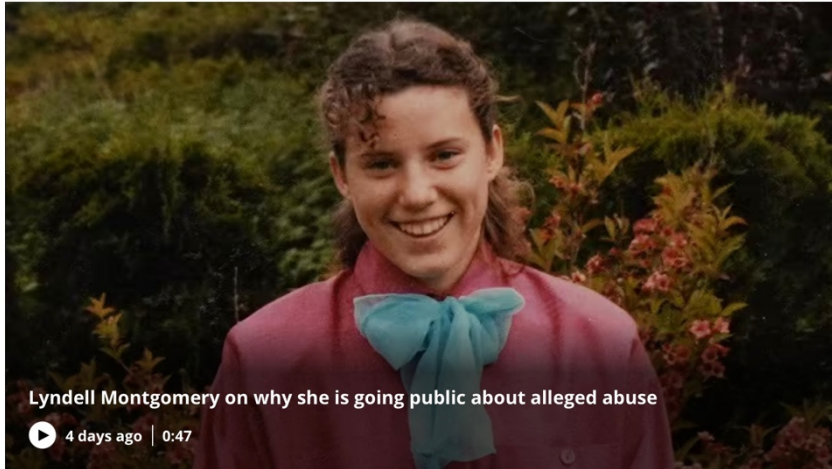
Lyndell Montgomery was 14 years old in 1989 when the alleged abuse happened. She claims her alleged abuser was 2x2s minister, Lee-Ann McChesney.

McChesney, 60, was arrested in January and charged with one count of sexual abuse and one count of sexual exploitation after an investigation by the Delta Police Sexual Offence Section and Vulnerable Sector Unit.

According to court documents, the charges stem from incidents in 1989 in or around the B.C. communities of Terrace, Delta and Surrey.

None of the allegations have been proven in court.

WATCH | Lyndell Montgomery explains why she's telling her story of alleged sexual abuse:



Lyndell Montgomery says she wants to tell her story of alleged sexual abuse within the 2x2s church so other survivors don't feel alone.

<http://www.cbc.ca/player/play/2314646595593>

Now 49, Montgomery says she wants to go public with her story to protect others in the church. She's asked that her name not be put under a publication ban by the court, as is usually the case with victims of alleged sexual violence.

"My story is one of thousands within this organization," she said in an interview. "I want to protect other kids that are still in that high control environment. I want to bring publicity to the fact that I am not the only [one]."

The 2x2s organization is being rocked by a wave of child sexual assault allegations making headlines in the United States, Australia and the United Kingdom.

According to the co-founder of a 2x2 victim hotline in the U.S. called Advocates For The Truth, 1,500 unconfirmed reports of child sexual abuse and other offences have been submitted in one year of operation.

"The response to the hotline has been overwhelming," said Cynthia Liles, who is also a private investigator specializing in child sex abuse cases against institutions of trust. "It's been a fire hose — just a deluge of reports coming in."

On Feb. 20, the Federal Bureau of Investigation announced it was investigating the 2x2s in the United States, and issued an appeal for [victims to come forward](#).

"The group has often been referred to by others outside of the group as '2x2,' 'The Way,' 'The Truth,' and 'The Church With No Name,' among others," reads the FBI alert.

"If you ... believe your child or other children may have been victimized by individuals affiliated with 2x2, the FBI requests you complete a short online [questionnaire](#)."

Who are the 2x2s?

The roots of the 2x2s trace back to 19th-century founder William Irvine, an evangelist Scotsman. Followers brought the faith to Canada in the early 1900s.

2x2s do not own places of worship, publish a leadership structure or keep public records.

The sect is largely a home-based fellowship, but Sunday gospel meetings — like one CBC attended at a Port Coquitlam, B.C., funeral chapel — are held at public venues.

Ministers, called "workers," are supposed to be free of worldly possessions and rely on church members, called "friends," for support.

Workers are dispatched to communities in pairs — two-by-two — to preach the faith while living in the homes of congregants, moving frequently. They are expected to be celibate.

Workers in top leadership positions are called "overseers."

Estimates put the number of 2x2 followers in the world today at 75,000. Liles says the majority live in Canada, the U.S., Australia and New Zealand.

Adopted into the faith

Montgomery says her membership in the 2x2 sect began when she was adopted at six weeks old by a family of devout first- and second-generation followers.

Growing up, there was violence in the family home, she says. After one particularly terrible blowup in 1989, she was sent to live with McChesney, who as a worker, held a position of authority and trust.

"My parents had implicit trust in the organization, in the workers, in all of it. They truly believed it was the one true way," said Montgomery.

Soon after the alleged abuse, Montgomery cut ties with her family and the 2x2s. In the intervening 35 years, she resisted overtures from church members to come back into the fold, wanting to keep her trauma firmly in the past.

But last year, a story in her local newspaper changed everything.

It was about the conviction of 2x2s worker Aaron Farough, who was found guilty on two counts of child pornography and sentenced to 175 days in prison. The offences took place while Farough was living in the family homes of 2x2 members on northern Vancouver Island.

"He was on the front page of the [Comox Valley Record](#), and as soon as I started reading it, I was like, oh my God," said Montgomery.

"I thought that I was in a silo, that no one ever in a million years would believe that anything happened to me ... and certainly not by a female minister-slash-worker."

CBC reached out to Merlin Affleck, the man identified by current and former church members as the 2x2 leader or "overseer" in British Columbia. Affleck declined to speak on camera or answer written questions about McChesney's charges, her status in the church and the FBI investigation.

WATCH | Secretive Christian sect accused of sexual abuse in B.C.:



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<http://www.cbc.ca/player/play/2315350595723>

In an email, Affleck said steps have been taken to protect children, including development of a child safe policy and a minister's code of conduct.

"In the last few years we've implemented many positive measures to insure the safety of children," he wrote. "But positive things don't usually make for interesting news, so I will respectfully decline your request for an interview."

CBC also asked a 2x2 worker leading the gospel meeting in Port Coquitlam last weekend for an interview. She declined.

Public reckoning

To some in the faith and many who have left it, 2x2 leadership needs to answer for the public reckoning that is now taking place.

Bruce Murdoch is one of them. The lifelong and current 2x2 member has been pushing the issue for over a decade as co-founder of a website that posts about child sexual abuse within the church.



Wings of Truth website co-founder Bruce Murdoch is a 2x2s member who posts about child sexual abuse cases within the church. (Corey Bullock/CBC)

"One of the things that the church does is it denies that it's even an organization, even though it's quite well organized ... So the denial of the fact that we are even an organization has really prevented proper management," Murdoch said, speaking from his home in Cranbrook, B.C.

"There are hundreds and hundreds of allegations that have not gone to the legal authorities, and for many, many years, the leadership of the church would not go to the authorities on purpose," he said.

As someone who studies alternative and controversial religions, Steve Kent says a lack of public accountability is common in groups with antagonistic attitudes to the outside world.

"The outside secular world is evil, fallen, even Satanic, and consequently they almost never go to outside authorities to report incidents of abuse," said Kent, professor emeritus at the University of Alberta.



A 2x2s member is pictured attending a gospel meeting in Port Coquitlam on Sunday. (Ben Nelms/CBC)

"What often happens is these groups have either internal investigative procedures that are very, very poor, or they get their abusers to repent and say they had a conversation with God and God has forgiven them."

CBC reached out to the FBI and RCMP to ask if the agencies were co-ordinating across borders on 2x2 allegations.

B.C. RCMP Staff Sgt. Kris Clark said he could not confirm or deny any investigation before charges are laid.

"We would encourage any survivor of sexual abuse regardless of when the offence occurred, to contact their local police to report it," he said.

In an email, the FBI said in order to preserve the integrity and capabilities of its investigation, no details would be shared.

McChesney is next scheduled to appear in Surrey Provincial Court on March 14.

About The Author

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



[Karin Larsen](#)

@CBCLarsen

Karin Larsen is a former Olympian and award winning sports broadcaster who covers news and sports for CBC Vancouver.

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/sex-abuse-charges-church-with-no-name-1.7121218>