



Child Abduction T.I.P.S. (Training, Information, Practices & Strategy)

Volume 3

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UPCOMING EVENTS:

Hosted by San Bernardino County Sheriff-Coroner Department

Identify the Missing

Date: Saturday, March 10, 2018

Place: Banquet Room at Central Park

11200 Base Line Rd

Rancho Cucamonga, CA 91701

Time: 9:00-3:00pm

What will the day include?

One-on-one meetings with forensic professionals who will be collecting dental records, medical reports and photographs of missing persons, and performing DNA cheek swabs on family members. Law enforcement will be on hand to file missing person reports, and gather and update information on older reports.

What to bring?

Families are encouraged to bring at least two biologically related family members of the missing person in order to provide DNA samples and any dental information, photographs and X-rays of the missing person.

Who should attend?

Families and friends affected by the mysterious disappearance of a loved one.

A Mother's Perspective & Lessons Learned: The Abduction & Murder of Samantha Runnion

By Erin Runnion, The Joyful Child Foundation

My daughter, Samantha Runnion, was abducted on a summer evening while playing outside with a friend about forty yards from our front door. Samantha's naked body was found the next day on a hiking trail about sixty miles from our home. It was ten days before her sixth birthday. It was 2002 and the media dubbed it the "summer of abductions." The Danielle VanDam abduction and murder trial was underway in San Diego and Elizabeth Smart had been missing for over a month. I had thought I was more likely to win the lottery than have my child kidnapped from my front yard. As I reeled with fear and then grief, I started to research crimes against children to get some context for what had happened. The more I learned, the more determined I became to cultivate a national movement to prevent crimes against



children. Less than two months later, my family established The Joyful Child Foundation (www.thejoyfulchild.org) with a mission to prevent crimes against children through programs that educate, empower, and unite families and communities.

In the fifteen years since losing Samantha I have shared my story countless times because it provides some purpose to the tragedy. I credit the exemplary law enforcement response with my ability to focus on grieving and honoring my daughter. Individuals went above and beyond to help us understand what was happening and what to expect next. When we wanted to do something to help, they offered guidance and facilitated connections. As a result, my family could grieve without the anger and frustration so many victims feel. We could focus on creating a new normal for our family and a positive legacy for Samantha. I hope that the following lessons learned provide some insight into how law enforcement may better serve families when a child is missing to improve outcomes for all involved.



Establish Trust

Communication is the most important component of the relationship with left-behind parents and/or the family of victims. Most families do not know anything about real-world investigations or the judicial process. Be proactive and explain what is happening and what they can expect. If you need information and/or you cannot share some information with the family, explain how it will help find and/or bring justice to their loved one.

Build Relationships

On day one, give victims and/or their family a point person to contact should they have any questions as the investigation continues. Ideally, have officers connect with individual family members and encourage them to reach out if they think of anything. Family members may have information to share that they may not want to divulge in front of other family members. If necessary, schedule a regular time to check-in with the family to give them an update. Always talk to the family before releasing any new information to the media.

Provide Direction

Family members need to feel like they are helping in the search for their missing child. Provide simple instructions and parameters for hanging posters and/or on social media. At a minimum, provide a list of relevant non-profit organizations and accessible local resources for the family.

Facilitate Connections

While the immediate family may be in a state of shock, it is helpful to identify a family/friend representative who may take part in briefings. This person may be able to process information more reasonably and offer emotional support after you leave. Ask the family if there is someone they trust who can serve as a liaison for them should they feel overwhelmed. Suggest the family contact local non-profit, faith-based, or community service organizations that provide victim and/or crisis support services.

Fraud and Forgery in Child Abduction Cases

By Deanne Castorena, Deputy District Attorney

A common trend in child abduction criminal cases is acts of fraud and forgery to secure physical possession of the abducted child. For example, one mother in Los Angeles faked a remarriage to her former husband and father of the child by hiring a man to play the part. The “marriage” was confidential, in which the participants need not provide witnesses. The mother took the faked “marriage certificate” to the child’s school and attempted to take the child from school claiming that because she was “remarried” to the father, the custody order giving the father full custody and the mother only visitation was void. The well-versed administrator at the school did not fall for the trick and instead called police. Along with this scheme, the mother also filed multiple false police reports against the father, even faking a domestic violence incident at which the father had never been present. The mother convinced a “friend” she met on the Internet to pose as a Good Samaritan and claim she had witnessed the domestic battery at the side of the road. The father was arrested for the incident, but due to sound police investigation and a tenacious deputy district attorney, the father was exonerated and the mother convicted. Following the preliminary hearing, in which the mother was held to answer on 17 counts, including attempted child abduction, perjury, false personation, filing false documents in a public office, and filing false police reports, the judge opined that “a frightening egregious campaign or terror was waged upon the victim father.” The mother pled guilty to eight counts for a sentence of six years in state prison.

In another recent case, Los Angeles District Attorney Investigators recovered two siblings pursuant to a Penal Code § 3130 order and returned them to their father, who had been given full, sole custody by a Colorado Family Court. Thereafter, on Christmas Eve day, the mother filed several fraudulent documents in Family Court (Los Angeles) requesting an *ex parte* order for a change in custody and recovery by the LADA investigators. The judge, who signed the order at 3:00 PM, did not check for any other custody orders and signed the mother’s proposed *ex parte* order, which directed the FBI to recover the children. That order was later vacated and the Family Court Judge with the leading case number consolidated all of the family law matters under her case number. Further, the Judge found the mother to be a vexatious litigant and reiterated that jurisdiction of the case remains in Colorado. The mother pled guilty to one count of Penal Code section 115, filing forged documents in court, for a three-year prison sentence suspended. The same mother was prosecuted by LADA in a separate case for welfare fraud in violation of Welfare and Institutions Code § 10980(c)(3) because she collected money from the Department of Social Services in California for the children when they were living exclusively with their father in Colorado.

Other family members have been successfully prosecuted for perjury in procuring multiple CDLs/California Identifications, or for securing restraining orders based on provably false claims, when these acts are done in order to take, keep or hide the abducted child. It is well worth the effort of law enforcement officers and prosecutors to investigate and evaluate fraud and forgery crimes in conjunction with child abduction charges.

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