



# CHILD ABDUCTION T.I.P.S. NEWSLETTER

*Training, Information, Practices & Strategy*

Volume 19

March 1, 2022



## **Dogs in Court**

by Deanne Castorena

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Facility dogs, also known as courthouse dogs, work with crime victims, predominantly children, to help foster a safe and more comfortable environment as the children give testimony in court. These dogs play a crucial role in easing stress felt by children in the court system during filing interviews and testimony preparation. They have accompanied victims in the witness box during testimony at preliminary hearings and trials. Thus, a facility dog that accompanies a witness into court is not a household pet, but instead is a highly trained dog in the care of a trained handler. In January 2017, the Los Angeles District Attorney's Bureau of Victim Services (BVS) established the "Victim Services K-9 Unit" (VSK-9). The K-9 unit currently has three facility dogs (Skippy, Nora, and Lennox) who were bred, trained, and socialized by Assistance Dogs of the West. One VSR is assigned as the primary handler to each dog. As primary handlers, the VSRs accept total responsibility for the welfare of the dogs and take the dogs home each night. Three VSRs have been certified as handlers and have passed a public access test. The VSK-9 team has been granted access to all Los Angeles Superior Court buildings, as well as approval to provide support to victims inside courtrooms for the purpose of accompanying victims to the witness stand during testimony. Currently, the VSK-9 Unit aids victims and witnesses from seven courthouses and the specialized units housed at the Hall of Justice in Los Angeles. Obtaining additional facility dogs in the coming years will allow BVS to better manage the large number of requests received by deputy district attorneys for a facility dog. In addition, BVS anticipates that additional facility dogs will play a critical role in assisting child victims in the Los Angeles Sheriff's Department (LASD) Special Victims Bureau (SVB), the families of homicide victims seeking assistance from the LASD, Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) Homicide Bureaus, as well as a critical part of LADA/BVS first-responders to mass casualty events.

VSK-9 teams also provided much-needed assistance to hundreds of victims, family members, and witnesses affected by the tragic mass shooting at the Harvest Festival Concert in Las Vegas on October 1, 2017, and the mass casualty incident at the Borderline Bar and Grill in Thousand Oaks on November 7, 2018. BVS recognizes these specialized VSK-9 teams (facility dog and human advocate) will be called upon to deploy as first responders in the event of a mass casualty or crisis response. In the short time since the VSK-9 Unit's inception in 2017, BVS has heard story after story about the magical difference made by facility dogs and VSR/dog handlers for the most vulnerable victims.

## We Are Looking for Trainers!

Background: The Child Abduction Intervention and Resource Training Project provides multi-disciplinary training to California professionals with the goal of improved prevention, recovery, investigation, and prosecution in cases of abducted children. The project provides training and technical assistance to law enforcement, social service, and other professionals in order to increase their capacity to effectively respond to such cases. CIR is seeking dynamic and diverse experts to work as instructors for this project.

Call for Presenters: CIR relies on instructors who are the leaders in the field to provide the highest quality training and technical assistance. This program is built on professionals with the right combination of practical experience with child abduction cases, education, and teaching abilities. We are seeking instructors with experience and expertise pertaining to child abduction in one or more of the following fields:

- Social Services Procedures and Resources
- District Attorney Investigator Procedures

Requirements: In addition to practical experience, we are seeking those with exceptional instructional skills. All new instructors must pass a comprehensive evaluation process, including review by the California Child Abduction Task Force.

If you would like to be a member of a team of professionals committed to providing the best in training and support, please submit a proposal to Crystal Cardenas via email at [crystal.cardenas@cirinc.org](mailto:crystal.cardenas@cirinc.org).

### Proposals should include:

- Summary descriptions of topics, training components, and estimated time for your presentations
- Resume and qualifications
- Brief professional bio
- 2-3 professional references

### Proposals will be rated by or according to:

- How well specific topics match project goals
- Presenter qualifications and experience
- References
- Other

DEADLINE FOR PROPOSALS: March 31, 2022

Thank you for your time and consideration! Please do not hesitate to share this announcement to other professionals who may be interested in this opportunity.

Thank you!

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