



CHILD ABDUCTION T.I.P.S. NEWSLETTER

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Task Force News



Pictured from left to right: Special Agent Joseph Brine (retired), Erin Runnion, Special Agent Brian Sullivan

On Wednesday, October 26, 2022, Donald Alway, Assistant Director in Charge, Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) Los Angeles Field Office, presented the 2021 FBI Director Community Leadership Award to Erin Runnion and The Joyful Child Foundation. Erin was recognized for the courageous work she has pioneered to honor her daughter, Samantha, who was abducted and murdered in July 2002. The FBI maintains a memorial stone at its Westwood building, celebrating Samantha's Life. Erin dedicates her efforts through The Joyful Child Foundation to develop child abduction prevention training and to collaborate with lawmakers to create and change laws to better protect children from all forms of abuse, neglect, and violence. Erin and The Joyful Child Foundation's outreach and education continues to prepare families and law enforcement agencies to prevent and respond to child abductions.

Child Abduction: The Schools Response & Responsibility

by Jannell Violi

Program Manager, Orange Co. Department of Education

A child's abduction is devastating to the child, the family, and the school where the abduction occurred. There are many possible reasons why abductions may occur within schools. First, most schools see hundreds of children arrive and leave safely every day without an actual or attempted abduction. Therefore, school employees become busy with their daily routines which might lull them into a false sense of security. In addition, child abductors will often take steps to appear to be a valid parent or other authorized individual. Sometimes the school knows the person who is asking to take the child and sometimes the child knows the person.

In general, a school is required to protect the safety and well being of its students. The types of civil lawsuits that can be brought against a school and its employees differ depending on a number of factors which include: 1) whether a school is public or private; 2) the state and local laws; 3) the school's policies and procedures; 4) the facts of the case, such as whether or not the abducted child is later found, and, if so, whether they are injured; and 5) the actions and duties of the school administrators and employees. Considering these factors, what steps can schools take to prevent child abductions on or around campus?

Implement Child Abduction Prevention Policies

- Limit the ability of unauthorized individuals to enter campus, especially after school has started.
- Ensure visitors go through the main administrative office and sign children out from school. This means that identification should be checked along with student release documentation on file. Visitors should not be permitted to wander around campus.
- Require all individuals whether teachers, administrators, or visitors to wear identification indicating their authorization to be on the premises.
- Maintain a current and available list of authorized people to take a child from school that includes picture identification if possible.
- Require consent from the authorized parent or legal guardian if an authorized person asks to remove a child from school before releasing a child to that person.
- Know and understand the family custody arrangement as specified in the student file.

Conduct Regular Training and Drills for School Personnel

Training and drills should be conducted for all school personnel including substitute teachers, and new/temporary employees. Such training should include role playing where school employees are shown a number of tactics that abductors use to take children without authorization. Training may include video examples of the ways in which children are abducted. Regular drills may include a rehearsed response to the following scenarios:

- What to do when visitors come to a school requesting to take a child.
- What to do when an abduction has happened on or around campus.
- How to respond when law enforcement comes to school requesting to interview teachers or children regarding the child who was abducted.
- How to respond if there is a suspicious person on campus or around the perimeter of campus.

Provide Prevention Education for Students

Prevention education for students should be incorporated in effort to teach them how to protect themselves. This training can be combined with other important prevention training at the beginning of the year, such as bullying, substance abuse, and harassment. For more information on prevention education, visit:

thejoyfulchild.org

The Wireless Emergency Alert

by Ken Roberts

Captain, California Highway Patrol

The Wireless Emergency Alert (WEA) is a part of the Integrated Public Alert Warning System (IPAWS) operated by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). The IPAWS program is FEMA's national system for local alerting and provides authenticated emergency and life-saving information to the public through mobile phones using WEAs; to radio and television via the Emergency Alert System; and on the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Weather Radio. IPAWS allows alerting authorities, including law enforcement and emergency management agencies, to send their messages using commercially available software to IPAWS, where it is authenticated and then delivered through the aforementioned platforms, as requested by the alerting authority.

The Wireless Emergency Alert is a partnership between FEMA, the Federal Communications Commission, and wireless providers to enhance public safety by sending short messages to cell phones and mobile devices when requested by alerting authorities. Wireless Emergency Alerts are limited to Presidential Alerts, Imminent Threat Alerts, Public Safety Alerts, AMBER Alerts, and Opt-in Test Messages.

In 2018, the CHP was the first agency in the nation to pioneer the process of successfully launching a WEA with an embedded hyperlink to a webpage containing additional information, including photographs. This innovative and largely successful practice was accomplished through a unique partnership with Twitter. Through this partnership, the CHP was able to ensure that any citizen that received the alert could navigate to the linked webpage, regardless of if they possessed a Twitter account or not. This functionality has been successfully tested throughout the state. The WEA activation in conjunction with a missing person's alert accounts for 41 percent of recoveries for Silver Alerts and 18 percent of recoveries for AMBER Alerts. No other public notification is more effective in recovering missing persons associated with a Silver Alert or children associated with an AMBER Alert than the WEA.

When the WEA was first introduced, the message was sometimes inadvertently received by cell phones and wireless devices outside of the geo-targeted area targeted for the alert. This unintentional delivery is referred to as "bleed over," which has a capacity to cause confusion and desensitization. In 2019, FEMA began working with cell phone carriers to update and upgrade their systems and cell towers to increase capabilities and alleviate potential problems such as messaging bleed over. The result is that newer cell phones and mobile devices now receive the targeted message within 1/10th of a mile accuracy. Along with this achievement, FEMA was able to increase the allowable character count of WEA messages and added support for Spanish language messages.

www.childabductions.org

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