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I-SEARCH For Missing and Exploited Children

"I-SEARCH ... is a comprehensive program designed to promote an immediate and effective response to the issues of missing and exploited children."

By
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and
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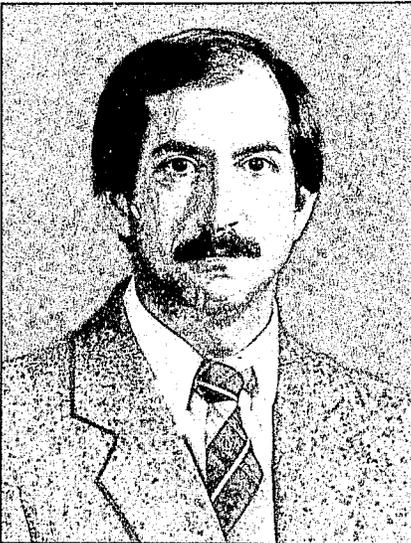
The authors served as key consultants to a fast foods corporation's national "Safe Kids" program. They cooperatively developed the child safety messages contained in a special booklet designed to stimulate communication between parents and their children.

The issue of missing and exploited children is a serious and complex problem that threatens the well-being of our Nation. Yet, despite the nature and national scope of the issue, the criminal justice response to missing and exploited children has a tainted history, and even today, is filled with paradoxes.

Many of the current efforts in this area were initiated by victims or their families. Parents of missing, exploited, or murdered children have become some of the most vocal critics of the ineffectiveness and irrationality of our criminal justice system in handling these cases. Fortunately, victims are not the only critics. Criminal justice pol-



Superintendent Ferguson



Deputy Superintendent Mascaro

icy makers and practitioners are changing the system from within, with a heightened concern for the safety of children.

History of I-SEARCH

In Illinois, there has been a continuing evolution in the manner in which missing children cases are handled. In late 1982 and early 1983, several highly publicized incidents involving missing children, in particular, the murder of a 16-year-old girl, resulted in the Illinois General Assembly adopting a resolution that called for public hearings to identify and define the scope of the missing children problem and the government's response. The Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority and the Illinois Department of Law Enforcement were assigned the responsibility of conducting the hearings, and after extensive research, prepared a report to the general assembly detailing the problem and making numerous recommendations on the issue.

In the spring of 1984, legislation was passed that implemented many of the report's recommendations. The new measure, signed into law by the governor in September 1984, and entitled the "Intergovernmental Missing Child Recovery Act,"¹ created the I-SEARCH Program.

I-SEARCH is an acronym which stands for *Illinois State Enforcement Agencies to Recover CHildren*. It is a comprehensive program designed to promote an immediate and effective response to the issues of missing and exploited children.

I-SEARCH defines a missing child as a child whose whereabouts is unknown to the parents. Based upon a report of a missing child, I-SEARCH

responds with a network of resources linked together for maximum effectiveness. This comprehensive network includes police, parents, public and private agencies, schools, and the general public working together to address this problem.

The primary purpose of I-SEARCH is to prevent children from becoming victimized by molesters, abductors, or exploiters through public education programs. I-SEARCH also seeks enhanced investigative efforts in finding children who are missing, identification and investigation of child exploitation, and reintegration of recovered children with their families.

The development of I-SEARCH included an analysis of governmental responses to the issue of missing and exploited children. A retrospective view of criminal justice efforts to prevent, investigate, and provide follow-up treatment for missing and exploited children revealed a system of actions based upon erroneous and potentially dangerous assumptions. Perhaps the most egregious of these is the "24-hour rule." Many law enforcement agencies have developed an administrative policy of waiting 24 hours in missing person investigations. In fact, an informal poll in Illinois during the development of I-SEARCH revealed that about one-third of the agencies surveyed had such a policy in effect at the time.² The problem has been exacerbated by the fact that in the absence of clear evidence of foul play, many law enforcement agencies have assumed that the child is a runaway and therefore not at risk. As we are discovering today, the possibility of foul play cannot be ruled out until clear evidence to the contrary surfaces, and our basic assumption about runaways not being at risk is ill-conceived. It is all too often the sad experience of those investigating cases of child exploitation

I-SEARCH, in cooperation with a local dairy producer, published photographs on milk cartons distributed over a seven state area. This carton led directly to the recovery of Nora and Ryan Doherty, parentally abducted from Illinois and recovered from Terre Haute, IN.

to find that runaways provide the constant source of vulnerable children for criminal exploitation.

Parental abductions have traditionally been viewed as an insignificant problem by law enforcement, the courts, and even the general public. It is inconceivable to many that a parent would abduct his or her child and subject that child to abuse—psychological, physical, or sexual. In examining the motivations for these abductions, we have found that they are primarily committed out of anger and frustration in an attempt to control or manipulate a spouse. The child is frequently the pawn in a struggle between parents. In many I-SEARCH recoveries of child victims of parental abductions, we have found a varied but common pattern of abuse and neglect.

Although the mass media has become a cooperative and powerful ally in the search for missing children, it too cannot withstand the acid test of its historic treatment of the issue. For years parents appealed to the media for exposure of their cases; yet only recently has the media consented to the routine use of its resources in educating the public regarding the issue and locating and recovering missing children.

The system has broken down in many other ways. Territoriality between agencies sometimes results in critical information not being shared, and therefore, missing children stay missing and exploited children continue to be exploited. Cumbersome bureaucracies may result in cases "slipping through the cracks" of the system. Ineffective legislation and questionable judicial action can further

hamper efforts. The issue of missing and exploited children is highly complex and demands that those dealing in this issue be educated and informed. Yet, few incisive training programs are available at each level of the criminal justice system.

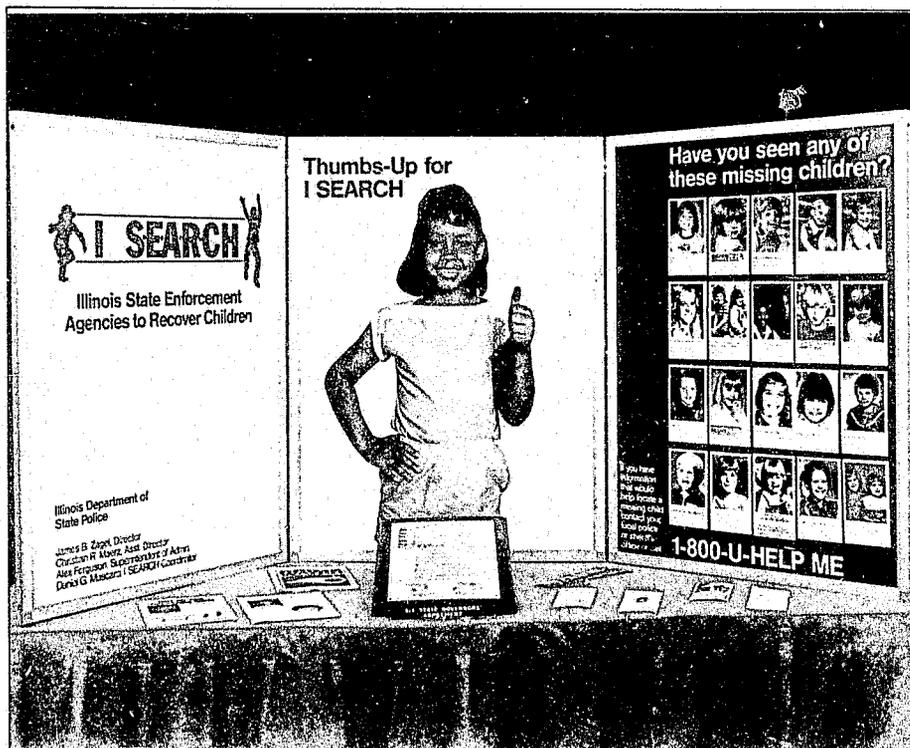
Victim Perspective

In the development of I-SEARCH, one consideration emerged as primary—view the problem from the perspective of the victim and family. The victims of crimes against children

speak with a soft voice. They have neither power nor influence. The adults that criminally abuse and profit by the inexperience and vulnerability of children betray the natural trust that children have of adults.³ Parents of these children deserve sensitive treatment by criminal justice practitioners and a system that is both responsive and effective in handling these cases.



"The issue of missing and exploited children is highly complex and demands that those dealing in this issue be educated and informed."



This display has traversed the nation with I-SEARCH speakers in an effort to raise public awareness.

also required to provide prompt confirmation of the entry of a missing child report into LEADS to the parent or guardian of the child.

LEADS also provides the vehicle for the entry of dental and other physical descriptive records of missing persons into NCIC for comparison of these records with the national unidentified person file in an attempt to identify missing persons found dead.

Several modifications have been made in the system to collect detailed information for the LEADS data base. I-SEARCH mandates data entry and cancellation codes to collect specific information on case type and disposition. These basic files provide the research and are developing into one of the most accurate State-level data bases yet developed for missing and exploited children.

I-SEARCH Units/Participating Agencies

The I-SEARCH grant program provides the funding for the development of local I-SEARCH units. Local government units including police, other criminal justice agencies, social services agencies, school boards, and other organizations can band together to address the problem of missing children on a community or regional basis with the assistance of State funding. In the last year, over \$2 million of State monies have been distributed to fund the development of local units. Agencies desiring to be a part of the statewide I-SEARCH network without receiving State funding may become an I-SEARCH "participating agency" by signing an agreement of intergovernmental cooperation with the Illinois State Police.

Cycle of Violence

Perhaps the most compelling argument for aggressive action in dealing with abuse and exploitation of children is the interdiction of the "cycle of violence." Mounting research evidence indicates that children who have been violently abused or sexually exploited will become the abusers and exploiters of the future.⁴ There is also increasing evidence that a common link between most violent criminals in society today may be the fact that they were abused psychologically, physically, or sexually as children.⁵ The nexus between child victimization and violent adult criminality demands our attention and continued research.

Data Collection

The statistics regarding missing and exploited children have long been an issue of contention. Long term planning requires accurate data. I-SEARCH is collecting this data in LEADS (Law Enforcement Agencies Data System). LEADS is the Illinois computer telecommunications system linked to the FBI's National Crime Information Center (NCIC) and serving over 900 terminals located in Illinois law enforcement agencies.

Through legislation, I-SEARCH mandates immediate entry of missing children into LEADS and automatically produces a regional alert to law enforcement agencies whenever a missing child is entered into the system. Local law enforcement agencies are

"In the development of I-SEARCH, one consideration emerged as primary—view the problem from the perspective of the victim and family."

I-SEARCH units and participating agencies have a primary responsibility of increasing public awareness and educating children and parents in crime prevention techniques, as well as ensuring an effective response to all cases of missing and exploited children.

I-SEARCH units also provide child information packets for parents to maintain fingerprints and other identification information about their children to be used by investigators.

Investigations

Through I-SEARCH, the Illinois State Police actively investigates any report of a missing or exploited child. The safety of the child is always the primary concern of the investigation.

To assist in locating missing children, I-SEARCH has a toll free hotline—1-800-U-HELP-ME. It is used by the public to report information on a missing or exploited child or by a child in need of help. It has also been extremely useful as a central number for use in collecting leads in major case investigations.

Investigators have been deployed across the State to work exclusively on cases involving sexual exploitation of children. Cases of child prostitution, pornography, and sexually victimized or exploited children are the target of these investigations. Training has been provided in the special interview and investigative techniques designed and developed for such cases.

The investigators work closely with the FBI, U.S. Postal Inspection Service, U.S. Customs Service, Chicago Police Department, and many other local law enforcement agencies and are supported by the necessary

resources, including sophisticated communications and advanced surveillance technology. In addition, the investigators may be supplemented by selected Illinois Department of Children and Family Services case workers and I-SEARCH child psychologists who will assist in the investigation and provide support, counseling, and placement assistance for child victims. Training in sexual exploitation and related investigative techniques is also provided by the State to local law enforcement officers to enhance the response at the local level.

Under the "Intergovernmental Missing Child Recovery Act," all law enforcement agencies in Illinois are mandated to submit to the Illinois State Police a detailed sex motivated crime analysis report (SMCAR) in all cases where criminal acts are sexually motivated. The report contains information on victims, offenders, vehicles, and methods of operation. I-SEARCH has developed and funded a criminal intelligence computer system to provide support for the SMCAR and other investigative data bases. The network encompasses all investigative zones throughout the State, bringing intelligence capabilities to the fingertips of every special agent in the field.

Public Information and Education

Awareness of the problem is the first step to prevention. I-SEARCH uses a multifaceted program to inform the public and advise them on dealing with the issues of missing and exploited children. I-SEARCH publishes the "Missing Children Bulletin," a compendium of photographs of missing children, articles on new developments in the field, and crime prevention information. It is sent around the Nation in an effort to locate missing children and elevate the conscious-

ness of the public regarding these tragic cases.

Other publications include a *National Directory of Missing and Exploited Children Organizations* and a guide for parents and children on preventing abduction and actions to be taken if a child is missing. I-SEARCH has also provided speakers to numerous child safety workshops, national conferences, civic organizations, and governmental bodies.

The Illinois State Police has hired and trained 10 child safety officers under I-SEARCH to provide materials and make presentations in a very active ongoing child safety program. They are using a specially equipped robot—Trooper B. Safe—to interact with children and provide safety information. In addition, a series of televised public service announcements have been released describing how to get involved in the I-SEARCH network. Numerous and varied commercial enterprises have also cooperated with I-SEARCH to publish millions of pictures of missing children and child safety tips on milk cartons and billboards, in mass transit vehicles, grocery stores, magazines and newspapers, and numerous other media.

Psychological Services

The Illinois State Police's Office of Psychological Services has a crucial role in the I-SEARCH Program. A police psychologist has been employed by I-SEARCH to handle the special concerns relating to children's issues. These responsibilities include profiling offenders, interviewing recovered children and child exploitation victims, as-

sessing credibility of child testimony, and easing victim and family trauma. Also, psychologists are used to provide guidance and direction in the development of public education materials and crime prevention activities targeted for children.

Whenever a child is located, a unique team approach is used to effect the recovery. Special agent(s) and I-SEARCH psychologist(s) work with the family members to handle the reintegration of the child back into the family. In criminal investigations involving child victims, the main consideration is developing new information and insight without causing additional trauma to the child. This team can effectively develop the criminal case against an abductor or abuser, while caring for the immediate psychological needs of the victim and family.

Legislation

Those involved with the I-SEARCH Program continue to refine the program and address additional problems by introducing and supporting child protection legislation. The proposed changes in the statutes are numerous and varied, but concentrate on making government's response to the missing and exploited children issue more effective and appropriate. These new initiatives seek increased awareness and involvement of many sectors of society, restructuring criminal law to provide greater protection for children, and procedural changes that allow for effective interagency cooperation. Some of these measures include:

- Mandatory crime prevention education in grades K-8;
- Requirement that public schools grades K-8 notify legal guardian within 2 hours if child is absent;

- Criminal background checks on child care facility workers;
- Creation of a new criminal offense "Harboring a Runaway;"
- Modification of child abduction laws to include parental abductions that occur *prior* to custody or paternity decisions;
- Seizure of vehicles used with consent of owner in the commission of certain sex offenses; and
- Criminalizing the mere possession of child pornography.

This effort to address statutorily these needs in State law is an ongoing activity of the I-SEARCH Program that also requires the public to voice their concerns to their elected officials.

Interstate Agreement

The I-SEARCH concept has expanded to six States in the Midwest. The governor of Illinois brought together the governors of Iowa, Indiana, Kentucky, Missouri, and Wisconsin to become signatories to an agreement creating a new meaning for the I-SEARCH acronym: I-SEARCH now stands for *Inter-State Enforcement Agencies to Recover CHildren*. The purposes of the agreement to:

- Develop a network to collect and share data concerning missing and exploited children and a criminal intelligence system to research and analyze trends and patterns of child victimization;
- Explore the feasibility of participating in a regional "Missing Children Bulletin" and hotline, a regional alert system, and cooperative training and investigation;
- Develop a model structure for the approach to the problems of missing and exploited children, including standards for law enforcement response;

- Examine improved methods for the return of missing children, extradition of offenders, standardized safety programs, and the integration of public and private sector resources to further the identification and recovery of missing and exploited children.

The governors of the six signatory States have also created an advisory board of high-level public safety officials to oversee the implementation of the agreement.

Conclusion

I-SEARCH works. Many children have been recovered in several different States and local I-SEARCH units have also recorded hundreds of success stories in Illinois. No barrier is too large to stand in the way of the ultimate interest of I-SEARCH—the safety of a child.

The challenge to law enforcement in this emotionally charged issue is great. The response by law enforcement must meet both the traditional public expectations and a new human imperative. I-SEARCH and the law enforcement and government officials which guide it have accepted that responsibility.

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Footnotes

¹Illinois Public Act 83-13541.

²Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority and Illinois Department of Law Enforcement, *Report to the General Assembly on Missing Young Adults*, 1984, p. 12.

³A. Nicholas Groth, William F. Hobson, and Thomas S. Gary, *Social Work and Child Sexual Abuse* (New York, NY: Haworth Press, 1982), p. 130.

⁴Chief William L. Hart, et. al., *Attorney General's Task Force on Family Violence* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, 1984), pp. 2-3.

⁵Robert W. ten Benschel, "The Scope of the Problem," *Juvenile and Family Court Journal*, vol. 35, No. 4, 1984, pp. 3-5.

