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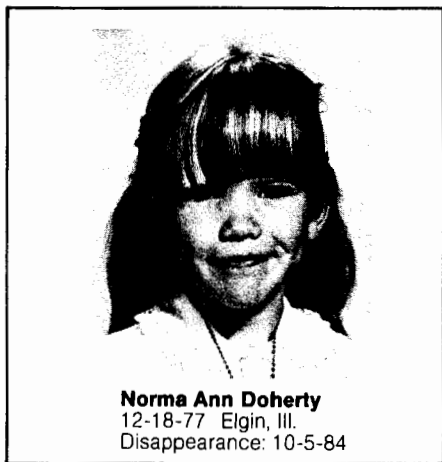
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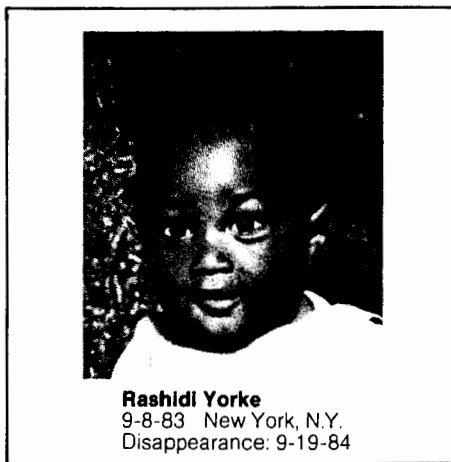
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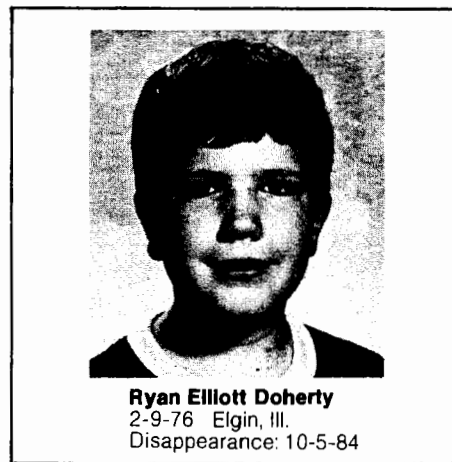
Missing Children: A National Tragedy



Norma Ann Doherty
12-18-77 Elgin, Ill.
Disappearance: 10-5-84



Rashidi Yorke
9-8-83 New York, N.Y.
Disappearance: 9-19-84



Ryan Elliott Doherty
2-9-76 Elgin, Ill.
Disappearance: 10-5-84

A child disappears from home every day. Actually many children do. It is a national tragedy of monumental proportions, and one that will not be resolved in the near future.

Many who think of the problem of missing children think, primarily, of those children who either disappear for no apparent reason or those whose non-custodial parents kidnap them. Why? Because these families are the most vocal and the least likely to accept their child's disappearance without a fight. Therefore, the public is made aware of their plight either through the news media or through "docudramas" such as "Adam," the story of Adam Walsh who disappeared while he was shopping with his mother, only to be found dead shortly after his disappearance.

While these are traumatic occurrences, nationally, abducted children constitute only an approximate 35% of the total number of missing children. And, in Virginia, they are only 3% of the missing children. It is runaways who account for the remaining 97%. Therefore, in Virginia, runaways are the vast majority of those children who disappear from home.

"I think it's a shame that stranger-abducted children are getting all the attention," says Kenneth Lanning, special agent with the FBI's Behavioral Science Unit. "That is not to say that I am not concerned about abducted children. I am

very concerned. But, all the attention causes an overreaction about the possibility of a child being abducted. And, more important than that, the 'hype' associated with stranger abduction may cause us to ignore or forget about another very tragic situation, the runaway child."

This article is devoted to the problem of missing children in general—all missing children: those whose disappearance is a mystery; those who are stolen by the non-custodial parent; and those who find being home intolerable and run away.

Mysterious Disappearances:

Nationally, approximately 50,000 children disappear for no apparent reason each year (National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, 1984). And, in Virginia on Sept. 14, 1984, there were four open cases of stranger-abducted children (Report of the Division for Children On Missing Children, 1985). While these children may constitute the smallest number of missing children, "they can be weighted at 10 times their number for the emotional havoc they leave in their wake" (Newsweek, 1984, p. 78).

Who are the children who are abducted? "Good question," says Lanning. "I am not sure what child is at risk. I do know, however, that we imagine the young child to be most vulnerable. I believe that it is the adolescent who is at greater risk of being

abducted; that there are more people preying on the adolescent than the young child."

When children disappear for no known reason it is assumed that a stranger has kidnapped them. There is no other logical explanation. What kind of person kidnaps a child? Lanning believes that most people picture the stranger abductor as a pedophile. "That's not necessarily true," he asserts. In fact, he gives the following descriptions for people who might abduct children:

- The emotionally disturbed: Usually a woman who has lost a baby or cannot conceive and steals a child to fill a maternal void;
- The profiteer: A criminal exploiter who sells babies to pornography rings or adoption rings;
- The ransom collector: The person who kidnaps a child and later calls the family demanding a ransom for the child's return;
- The sexually motivated: The person who abducts a child primarily for sexual purposes. This person may abduct a child for a day or only a few hours or may try to keep the child indefinitely and murder the child when he or she demands to be taken home. There are some who believe this is the largest category;
- The child killer: The best known case in recent history was in Atlanta when 29

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VaNCPA

**Virginia Chapter of the National Committee
for the Prevention of Child Abuse**
205 W. Franklin St., Richmond, Va. 23220



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young blacks, ages 7-27, were abducted and killed (Newsweek, 1984). This person abducts children for the purpose of killing them.

The effect on the parents and relatives is devastating beyond comprehension. For those whose children have been missing without a trace, such as Elan Patz, who disappeared from Manhattan's SoHo neighborhood five years ago, there is a mixture of constant hope and looking, as well as deep despair. For those who find their children dead, there is an extreme emptiness and severe anger which defies words. And, as if this tragedy is not hard enough on a family, they also find themselves the victim of suspicion as well as vicious rumors. "Indeed, the parents...are often the first suspects when a child disappears. It is one of the many insults added to their injury—along with the whisperings of friends and total strangers about their parental competence" (Newsweek, 1984). Parents of missing children may find that friends shun them. Could this be a response of people who are afraid that, if there is no explanation for its occurrence, abduction of a child is something that could possibly happen in their family? (McCalls, 1983).

Typically, police dislike these cases. "Kidnappings of children are distressingly easy to commit and notoriously difficult to solve" (Newsweek, 1984, p. 29). In fact, a number of sources have commented that finding a stolen car or even a stolen pet is easier than finding a stolen child. And, once leads have been exhausted, there is little that can be done. The result is frustration, anger and profound feelings of help-

lessness on the part of both the family and the law enforcement officials.

Once a child is missing, there is little a parent can do other than activate the law enforcement system, circulate fliers and be vocal in their community. However, there are many things that can be done in order to prevent a kidnapping from occurring. The primary preventive tool is education. While it is a difficult topic to discuss, children need to be given direct safety messages delivered in a straightforward manner. (See safety tips for preventing abduction.)

family to be produced by them only if necessary.) Secondly, few believe that fingerprinting by itself will help find a missing child. It will probably be most helpful when it comes time to identify the dead body of a child.

There are alternatives to fingerprinting, such as maintaining current pictures or videocassettes of the child with accurate identifying information such as eye color, height, weight, size of shoes and clothes, and any identifying marks. It is also helpful to keep dental and medical records up-to-date, as well as knowing where these

MYTH: The majority of missing children are those who are either abducted by a stranger or by their non-custodial parent.

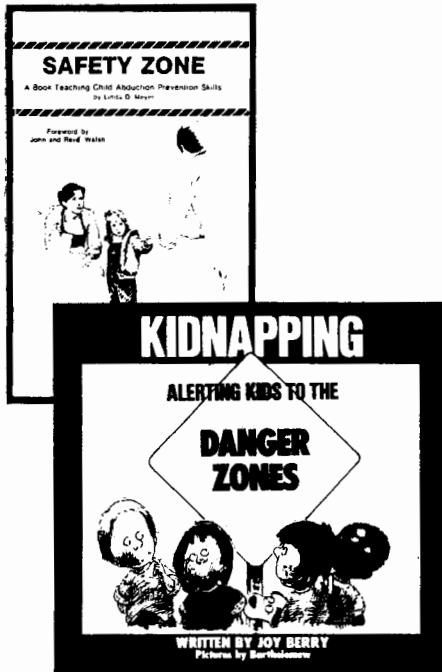
REALITY: In our nation, there are approximately 1.5 million missing children! Of these, approximately 1 million are runaways, 500,000 non-custodial kidnappings, and 50,000 disappear for no apparent reason. Statistics show that approximately 97% of Virginia's missing children are runaways.

One popular safeguard for parents is that of fingerprinting. The literature, while supporting this idea for the most part, raises several concerns that parents need to consider about fingerprinting. First and foremost is the issue of protecting the child's rights. Some fear that police intervention could possibly result in a government master file of children's fingerprints. (Parents are cautioned that, if they wish to have their child fingerprinted, the prints should be maintained by the

records can be found (Changing Times, 1984).

Nationally, Curtis Mathes dealers are cooperating with local community groups to sponsor videotaping of children as potential assistance in case of abduction. The child is videotaped from all angles as well as in motion and talking. Thus, voice, expression, mannerisms and movements can be noted. Parents pay only for the cost of the videocassette, which they keep. It is updated each year for free.

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Prevention Resources

Safety Zone: A Book Teaching Child Abduction Prevention Skills by Linda D. Meyer, 1984, pp. 18, \$3 (softback)

Available from: The Chas. Franklin Press, 18409 90th Avenue W., Edmonds, WA 98020.

Alerting Kids to the Danger of Kidnapping by Joy Berry, 1984, pp. 48, \$5.95 (hardback)

Available from: Word, Inc., Educational Products Division, 4800 W. Waco Drive, Waco, Texas 76796.

Both books are excellent resources for teaching safety skills to children ages 3-11. Both contain sections for parents and/or teachers. Either resource will assist in giving children the best protection from abduction—knowledge of precautionary techniques.

Strong Kids/Safe Kids, a home video cassette produced by Paramount Home Video, 1985, \$19.

Available from: Bradlees Department Stores, (to find the nearest Bradlees Store, contact Bradlees Mid-Atlantic Regional Office, 6555 Little River Turnpike, Alexandria, VA 22313).

For children up to age 12. Teaches children abduction prevention skills and skills in preventing child sexual abuse. *Bradlees is selling this program at their own cost in order to assist in the national effort to prevent missing children.*

Bradlees has also donated 298 copies of "Strong Kids/Safe Kids" to 149 libraries in towns where Bradlees has stores. They are distributing a free pamphlet entitled "Safety Tips for Shopping with Children" to their customers and have reprinted "Strong Kids/Safe Kids, a Companion Guide for Parents" for select distribution. Bradlees will also assist community organizations in Virginia and Maryland in planning child safety education events.

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Children Abducted by Non-custodial Parents:

While national statistics vary, it is believed by private groups that approximately 100,000 children are taken each year by a parent who, in a separation or divorce proceeding, was not granted custody (Gill, 1981). In Virginia, there were eight open cases of children who were reported as abducted by a non-custodial parent by September 14, 1984 (Division for Children, 1985).

MYTH: *Runaways are no more than disobedient, ungrateful children who are rebellious and acting out. If they wanted, they could return home to a happy, loving and nurturing environment.*

REALITY: While the exact numbers are not known, many of the runaways are running for a reason. They are sexually abused, physically abused, neglected, or members of a family where alcoholism and/or drug abuse is a problem. These are dysfunctional families. The youth remove themselves from their families the only way they know how. They run.

This number, of course, does not include all children who disappear from their homes along with a parent. If there is not a custody order, there is absolutely no legal complaint. In other words, a parent may leave with the children prior to a custody hearing, and it is difficult to force the parent to return. However, if one parent has legal custody of a child and the other parent kidnaps him or her, the parent is perpetrating a felony if the child is taken over state lines. And, under the Uniform Child Custody Jurisdiction Act of 1981, "states are required to honor a custody order from another state" (Gill, 1981, p. 17). For practical purposes, then, a positive aspect of this act is that abducting parents are less able to find safe harbor in the courts of a distant state. A negative aspect, however, is that a parent who abducts a child is more likely to go into hiding. Chances are that the parent taking the child will not be caught and, frequently, the child is never found.

Why do parents kidnap their own children? Is it because they love them so much that they cannot bear the separation? Possibly. It is equally likely, however, that the child becomes "a pawn, bartered goods like stocks or real estate, with which to forge a better 'deal'—financially, emotionally, legally—in the divorce process. Or they may be kept hidden, ultimate prizes hoarded by a spiteful ex-spouse" (Gill, 1981, p. 17).

There are not many places that the custodial parent can turn. There are resource centers and locator services which work with law enforcement agencies in an effort to locate missing children (See separate listing of national and state centers.) And, there is a government agency, the Federal Parent Locator Service.

The Federal Parent Locator Service was established by law in 1974 in order to assist in the enforcement of child support payments. As a part of the law, each state was mandated to establish its own locator system. This service has very broad powers, as it has access to state and federal records, such as social security files, Internal Revenue Service files, and Veterans Administration files. The purpose is to locate absent parents in order that parents pay support for their children when they have been ordered to do so.

The services provided by The Federal Parent Locator Service broadened, however, under the federal Parental Kidnapping Legislation of 1982. This act provided for the use of the service when a child is believed stolen by a non-custodial parent. "For a small fee, a law enforcement officer or agency can access information from the Federal Parent Locator Service if a child is believed to be parent abducted," explains Jean White, director of the Virginia Division of Support Enforcement Program. "This means, for instance, that, if the parent gets a job, and the social security number is used, we have a good chance of locating that parent."

Actually, then, the locator system can only be of use when the parent, "works on the books, paying social security taxes, and federal and state income taxes. Most child stealers live underground, work off the books, get paid in cash, and don't pay taxes" (Gill, 1981, p. 20).

In a majority of cases it is the father who is the abductor (Gill, 1981). Mothers are awarded custody more frequently than fathers. The fathers feel helpless: The laws are written to favor the mother, they say. While fathers used to live with their children, they are now reduced to visitors and guests. They have financial obligations and responsibilities, often with little visitation. In some cases, they don't see their children more than once or twice a month. In fact, a mother can leave the state making it almost impossible for the father to visit the children, and the father must continue to make support payments. This situation has men feeling very angry and frustrated. Sometimes their way of handling the situation is to refuse to return a child after a visitation, or to disappear, child in hand.

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Jennifer Ann Natoli
3-12-79 New Jersey
Disappearance: 4-25-84

The effects on the mother are devastating. "Many lose weight, quit jobs, waste money on lawyers and private investigators, go on welfare" (Gill, 1981, p. 20). They become depressed in their helplessness. There is little a mother can do. She feels despair as she wonders what her child is doing, if the child is alright and if she will ever see him again. She may become bitter and hostile. She will withdraw. Soon, emotional and physical exhaustion set in. The emotional and physical ramifications are serious and do not disappear easily.

Children are probably harmed the most. While some can adjust to the situation, many carry life-long scars (Gill, 1981). If they return home they exhibit fears of being left alone and they frequently do not trust others. "They cling to loved ones and fear strangers, doorbells and telephones. Some parents find their children have been neglected...when brought home they need medical and emotional support" (Gill, 1981, p. 139).

When a child has been gone for several years, and was abducted when very young, the child may be very resistant to the idea of leaving the home he or she has known. The mother is not someone the child remembers. Therefore, the return can be traumatic. A child may need psychological assistance in making the adjustment.

The long-term effects on abducted children are varied. Some may have difficulty establishing relationships as adults. A lack of self-identity which contributes to low self-esteem is common. Others may be overcome with guilt and depression to the point of attempting suicide. Often, the children have been lied to about the custodial parent, being told that the parent does not want to see them, and that they are unloved and unwanted. The feelings associated with these beliefs may remain for many years, with the child having difficulty trusting the custodial parent.

Children Who Run Away

By far the largest number of missing children are runaways. Nationally the estimate is that one million youth run away each year. In Virginia, the number of runaways on the files as open cases on Sept. 14, 1984 was 478 (Division for Children, 1985). Bill Bestpitch, a planner for the Division for Children who was responsible for an extensive study on the problem of missing children, stated that he was surprised at the extent to which runaways are the problem. Bestpitch comments, "In Virginia, approximately 97% of the missing children are runaways. I think that when most people think of missing children they think of something else. And, when people think of runaway children, they think of adolescent rebels who are merely acting out, and could return to a happy family. It's not true in most cases."

What is true, in most cases, is that children run away because of "family problems, difficulty in school, or peer pressure that can only be addressed within the context of the whole family" (Division of Children, 1985, p. 12). Rather than being the problem or the "sick" one in the family, the runaway may be the healthiest member of the family. Bestpitch explains, "By running, the youth is ending a terrible situation or attempting to survive, removing himself from a situation that is not conducive to growth. These kids are often running from physical abuse, sexual abuse, and alcoholism."

Actually, there are many more children living on the streets than those documented by missing children statistics. These include the "throwaways," those adolescents who have been kicked out—"thrown away" by their families. These youth frequently are not reported missing, but add to the large number of adolescents living on the streets or in make-shift accommodations in an effort to survive.

Who is the runaway? Actually, youth who run away are just as likely to be from an affluent family, a middle class family, or a family of poverty. Girls are just as likely to run away as boys. The racial and ethnic composition mirrors the percentage of those groups in the general population. Approximately 80% are 14, 15 and 16. Many of the children are multiple runaways; that is, they run away more times than one. Younger children tend to run away less frequently and for a shorter period of time. They are not likely to run very far. Older children tend to go farther and are not likely to return (Division for Children, 1985; U.S. News & World Report, 1985).

The runaway problem is a difficult one for a number of reasons. One is the present lack of authority experienced by the courts; another is the current attitude about emancipation of youth.



Bradley Eugene Reed
5-5-83 Hanover, Pa.
Disappearance: 4-13-84

First, the issue of emancipation. "Presently we as a nation are enamored with the concept of emancipation of a minor," says Nancy Wilhelm-Ross, program administrator for Oasis House in Richmond. According to Wilhelm-Ross, "a court can award emancipation to a minor. It usually occurs when a parent feels he or she can no longer handle the child, and the court thinks the child can take care of him- or herself. The parents don't want the responsibility, and the kids think it's great. However, when helping professionals are working with an emancipated youth, we lose our leverage to get the families involved in the problems the kids are experiencing. In addition, we have kids living on their own in our communities who are ill-prepared to do so."

In discussing the level of authority the courts experience when dealing with runaway youth, Bill Kearon, intake officer with the Virginia Beach Juvenile Court, states that all youth who came before the courts "used to be treated in the same way, whether they had robbed someone or they had run away: they were sent to a locked facility." However, in 1974, the federal government urged states to deinstitutionalize youth who commit incorrigible offenses such as truancy and running away. States followed that lead. "In order to ensure the continued flow of federal funds for youth programs, states changed their laws to prevent the prolonged incarceration of non-criminal minors" (U.S. News & World Report, 1985).

"This is called deinstitutionalization," Kearon explains. As a result, youth stay on the streets. "Police dislike these cases because they know that when they pick up a youth, particularly the one who is a multiple runaway, and place him/her in a nonsecure facility such as a runaway shelter, the youth is likely to be back on the streets in a short time. Courts don't like these cases because they feel they possess no

Missing Children Resources List

All Missing Children:

National Center for Missing
and Exploited Children
1835 K Street N.W., Suite 700
Washington, D.C. 20006
(202) 634-9821
(800) 843-5678

The Center provides a national clearinghouse of information about the problem of missing and exploited children; maintains a toll-free hotline for individuals who believe they have information that could lead to the location and recovery of missing children; also provides training assistance to law enforcement and child protection agencies, assistance in investigation and prosecution, information about effective legislation, prevention and education programs for community organizations, and distribution of photographs.

Adam Walsh Child Resource Center
227 S. Orlando Ave.
Winter Park, FL 32789
(305) 475-4847

Provides a multitude of services nationally, including education, training, court monitoring, distribution of fingerprint packet; legislative lobbying. Provides a support group for parents of missing children at the Center.

Child Find, Inc.
P.O. Box 277
New Paltz, N.Y. 12561
(914) 255-1848
(800) 431-5005

Assists in locating missing children; maintains a hotline for individuals with information about missing children and for children to call; distributes photographs; also provides community prevention and education programs.

The Missing Children Network
Prijetel Productions, Inc.
2211 South Dixie Drive
Dayton, Ohio 45409
(800) 235-3535

Publishes "Help Book," reference source for people trying to locate missing children which provides a listing of agencies and the services they can provide; also provides guidelines for preventing child abduction (Free to parents of missing children; others are asked for a donation). The Missing Children Network also acts as a locator service. They will accept child sightings through their 800 number.

Home Run
4575 Ruffner Street
San Diego, CA 92111
(619) 292-8878
(800) MISS YOU (49 states)
(800) HIT HOME (California)

A National Hotline as well as search system for all missing children; clearinghouse of information for youth agencies; counseling and intervention for youth and families; referral source for youth needing assistance.

SEARCH
560 Sylvan Ave.
Englewood Cliffs, N.J. 07632
(201) 567-4040

Publishes a magazine with most up-to-date information on missing children; maintains close contact with law enforcement agencies, NCIC, and the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children.

Missing Children: (Virginia)

Resource Center for Missing
and Exploited Children
Division of Missing Children
805 E. Broad Street
11th Floor
8th Street Office Building
Richmond, VA 23219
(804) 786-4835

Will provide resource materials for training and general information. Will begin operations July, 1985.

For Young People Only
214 E. Clay
Richmond, VA 23219
(804) 788-4667

Primarily involved in education for children; provides after school workshops using theater and role playing as the media; works primarily with school system. Awarded an accommodation for excellence from Gov. Robb.

Runaway Hotlines: (National)

Runaway Hotline
Governor's Office
105 Sam Houston Building
Austin, TX
1-800-231-6946

National Runaway Switchboard
Chicago, IL
1-800-621-4000

Runaway Services: (Virginia)

Mother Seaton House Ed Voss
642 N. Lynnhaven Road (804) 498-4673
Virginia Beach, VA 23452

New, walk-in service with capacity to serve 12 female youth; plans for three full-time staff and approximately 50 volunteers; counseling services, medical referrals, and aftercare services; conducts follow-up at 30 day intervals.

Oasis House Runaway Nancy Wilhelm-Ross
and Crisis Shelter (804) 329-0079
2918 Chamberlayne
Richmond, VA 23222

Walk-in service with capacity to serve 12 youth; 11 full-time and 2 part-time employees with approximately 50 volunteers; counseling, medical referrals, aftercare services, and independent living component for those youth who will be independent when leaving Oasis House.

Alternate House Mark Laks
2009 Gallows Road (703) 356-3574
Vienna, VA

Walk-in service with capacity to serve eight runaways; 10 full-time and eight part-time staff, approximately 40 volunteers; counseling, medical services; aftercare services.

Volunteer Emergency William Christian
Foster Care (804) 353-4698
2317 Westwood Avenue, Suite 109

Richmond, VA
Primary purpose is to recruit and train families to house abused, neglected, runaway and homeless children on a short-term basis; 32 local programs, with six more in developmental stages; trains families; youth referrals from local Department of Social Services.

Runaway Emergency Karyn Gunther Smith
Shelter Program (804) 977-4260
P.O. Box 424
(117 N. 4th Street)
Charlottesville, VA 22902

This service uses houses in the community, taking runaways on a 24-hour basis; one full-time and 4 part-time workers; two volunteers; counseling, medical referrals, aftercare services.

Lighthouse Runaway Bruce Bright
Hotline (804) 427-4777

Municipal Center
Virginia Beach, VA 23456
Hotline service of the Virginia Beach Juvenile and Domestic Relations Court Services Unit; 1 staff member, 11 volunteers; individual counseling and referral services.

Norfolk Runaway Marcia Sergent
Youth Project (804) 625-5805
Colonial Coast Girl (804) 877-1532
Scout Council

415 St. Paul's Blvd.
P.O. Box 628
Norfolk, VA 23501-1532
Program for repeater runaways; referrals from courts and social services; contacts family when youth returns home; provides counseling for family, medical referrals.

(Some of the above services are listed with the American Youth Work Center which provided VCPN with a National Directory of Runaway Programs (\$10.00); For more information contact

American Youth Work Center, 1346 Connecticut Ave., N.W., Suite 925, Washington, D.C. 20036; (202) 785-0764.

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real authority over the child. Frequently, then, the problem gets ignored because no one wants to fool with it."

Therefore, we are a nation with children on the streets and few services that are sophisticated enough to tackle the problem. Kearon did explain one program for the multiple runaway who has exhausted all other possible sources of help. However, it is an expensive program, and, to his knowledge, only one state, Rhode Island, has established it. He called the program one of having "policy secure homes." "While this is a home without locks, it is one that has a very small number of youth—no more than 20—and a very high youth/staff ratio. And, there are alarms on all doors and windows. So, if a youth starts to leave, staff knows it, and they use all of their persuasive techniques to convince the youth to stay. It seems to be a concept that is working."

Unfortunately, then, many multiple runaways are living on the streets. And, the streets are not safe. There are any number of perverse people who prey on the youths' vulnerability and need for security. For example, there is a clear link in the literature between the runaway problem, prostitution and pornography (Burgess, 1984; Division for Children, 1985; National Legal Resource Center for Child Advocacy and Protection, 1982; Weisberg, 1985).

Weisburg gives an account of male prostitution which confirms a relationship between prostitution and running away. A finding of this study was that 81% of male prostitutes left home before age 18 with a mean age of first leaving home being 14.8.

Studies of female prostitutes also show a correlation between prostitution and running away. In Weisburg's review of the literature, most female prostitutes reported that they ran away prior to their involvement in prostitution. In order to survive, many became prostitutes. Female prostitutes entered prostitution, on the average, at age 14 (Weisburg, 1985).

Missing children who become involved with prostitution may also become involved with pornography. There appears to be a close relationship between child pornography and child prostitution. "Frequently, a person hiring a child prostitute will also film the activities. These films are then reproduced and sold to distributors" (National Legal Resource Center for Child Advocacy and Protection, 1982, p. 2).

Is there a problem of prostitution and pornography amongst runaways in Virginia? Probably so, though there is no documentation. Wilhelm-Ross believes that prostitution is a problem in the Richmond area. She thinks, however, that the prostitution is not of the organized type where the child is a streetwalker who is governed by a pimp. Rather, she believes youth prostitutes are street children trying to survive. "These kids are bartering sex for food and shelter. These are youth with a history of sexual abuse or of being sexually active from a very early age. They communicate through sex, acting out what they know best. They are prime targets for perverse people who can offer them a roof over their heads for a hot meal."

Kearon, on the other hand, doesn't believe that prostitution is as much a prob-



Senator Canada
Chair of the Task Force on Missing Children

lem in the Virginia Beach area as is child pornography. However, he does agree that the kind of sexual activity described by Wilhelm-Ross also occurs at Virginia Beach. "No kid can be out on the streets alone for long without committing a crime or having a crime committed against him," he asserts.

Lanning, however, cautions us not to be too hasty in making a link between running away and sex. "Not all runaway children get involved in prostitution and pornography. Yes, some do, but there are other dangers. There are drug dealers, thieves and murderers who are also preying on these youth. And, I want to note that there are kids on the street prostituting or involved in pornography who are not missing. Some parents would be surprised; others are reaping the benefits. And, we really don't want to think about that, do we?"

Missing Children Acts: The Response to the Problem

There has been a national effort in recent years to deal with the problem of missing children. The impetus came, primarily, from families whose children had been abducted by strangers.

A national campaign was led by John and Reve Walsh, who refused to allow their child's abduction and subsequent death to become just another statistic. They spearheaded a drive to pass the Federal Missing Children Act which was introduced in the Senate by Paula Hawkins (R) of Florida and in the House by Paul Simon (D) of Illinois. Passed by both houses of Congress, the law established a national clearinghouse for missing children using the FBI's computerized system, the National Criminal Information Center (NCIC), making one more system available to law enforcement agencies and parents.

There is no required waiting period before children are entered into the system (in contrast to prior policy of waiting at least 24 hours before acting on a missing child report). According to proponents of the bill, the first 24 hours is the most crucial time in a police investigation. Parents

Safety Tips for Preventing Abduction

- ▶ Make sure your children know their full name and address (including state) and telephone number (including area code) and how to reach the operator to make a long distance phone call. Remember to teach young children to use both digital and dial telephones.
- ▶ Teach your children to avoid strangers who ask them to go somewhere, or who want to give them a present or treat. Instruct your child to tell you if he/she is approached by a stranger.
- ▶ Tell your children that it is unusual for strangers to ask children for directions, and to ignore them if one does. Tell children not to go near a stranger's car, and, if followed by a stranger in an automobile or on foot, to run to the nearest public place or to yell "Help."
- ▶ Do not buy clothing or conspicuous items with the child's name imprinted on it. A child is more likely to respond to a stranger if his/her name is called.
- ▶ Outline with the child a strategy if you are separated while shopping. A child should not look for the parent but should go to the nearest checkout counter or the office for assistance. Tell children to never go to the parking lot.
- ▶ Be sure that the school will not release your child to anyone but you or someone designated by you. Set up a code word that your child can use with any person you have sent to get him/her.
- ▶ Children need to be assured that they have the right to say no or to ignore the requests of strangers; that an adult stranger has no authority over him/her.
- ▶ Tell your child that no one has the right to touch children in a negative or confusing manner. If someone does, the child should tell the parent right away.
- ▶ Keep recent photographs or videotapes of your child. Be sure identifying information is written on the back of the photo. Young children grow and change rapidly, so several pictures a year should be taken.
- ▶ Keep dental and medical records current.
- ▶ Keep fingerprints on file at home.

(These safety tips have been compiled from the March 19, 1984 issue of Newsweek and the March 19, 1984 issue of Changing Times.)

have access to the computer system. After they report a missing child to the local law enforcement officials, they can check with the NCIC to be sure that the information has been entered.

The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children is the clearinghouse mandated by this act. This center had already been established through funds provided by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention at the U.S. Department of Justice, and was already equipped to assume the federal mandate. The center provides training assistance to law enforcement and child protection agencies, assists agencies involved in the investigation and prosecution of cases of criminally or sexually exploited children, provides information and advice on effective state legislation, provides education and prevention programs, provides materials for community education, coordinates the distribution of photos and information on missing children, and coordinates the exchange of information regarding child exploitation.

The advent of the concern on a federal level provided the impetus for Virginia legislators to request a study in the Commonwealth. A joint resolution passed the senate and the house of delegates in March 1984, which requested that the Virginia Division for Children study and review federal legislation and Virginia laws on missing children.

Martha Gilbert, director of the Division for Children, explains the study process. "We established a task force which would assist the division in its study and subsequent report. The list of members is a distinguished one, limited in number only because the group had to be a workable size. The make-up of the task force was extremely diverse. And, there was such an overwhelming interest that we could easily have had a task force of 100!" Sen. Joseph Canada from Virginia Beach, chair of the task force, agrees. He also stated that he remembers "very few absences of task force members during this project."

According to Bestpitch, who was responsible for the coordination of the study, there was overwhelming support statewide for a coordinated effort to deal with the problem of missing and exploited children. The study resulted in several important recommendations, including the establishment of a Missing Children Information Clearinghouse, the establishment of a resource center and the videotaping of a child's testimony in cases involving sexual victimization.

The Missing Children Information Clearinghouse passed both houses and was signed into law by the Governor this month. The Clearinghouse will begin operation in July. In addition, funds were appropriated for the development of the resource center.

However, the videotaping did not pass

in its present form. While Canada was disappointed that the law did not pass, he believes it will eventually. Bestpitch agrees, stating that there were simply too many concerns on the part of the legislators regarding the balance between protecting the child victim and ensuring that the defendant's rights are protected. "This was a short session, and it may be that the legislators needed more time to address their concerns," Bestpitch says. However, he also feels that the house and senate courts of justice committees need to be working on the legislation throughout the year rather than waiting until the legislature is in session. "If they wait, it may not get done. It's too hectic when the houses are in session. I urge concerned readers to talk to their legislators, especially those on these particular committees, about the need for steady work on this bill."

The Missing Children Information Clearinghouse Act establishes a variety of services:

- a statewide hotline
 - a centralized file for the exchange of information on missing children within the Commonwealth
 - maintenance of close contact with NCIC and the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children
 - the circulation of a monthly bulletin on missing children to the news media
 - assistance to law enforcement agencies in planning and implementing programs to fingerprint children
- The Virginia Department of State Police will fulfill these responsibilities.

The resource center will be housed at the Division for Children. "We received an appropriation of \$89,000 which will be available in July. We will establish the center, buying many films, books and videotapes which will be available to the public for a very small rental fee. Also, we will provide coordination for training in issues centering around missing and exploited children. In fact, we plan to produce our own training film for police and social workers which will address investigation techniques for missing and exploited children. There is very little training material available now," says Bestpitch.

Both Canada and Bestpitch are pleased with the results of the task force. However, both express a deep concern about the number of runaways in the state. "This is an issue that needs a great deal more work," Canada states.

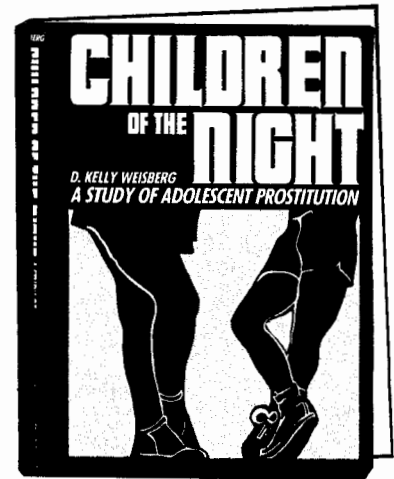
Response of Law Enforcement

Both the state and federal acts place the ultimate responsibility for investigating children reported as missing on the local law enforcement officials. The state and federal clearinghouses are not law enforcement agencies. And, law enforcement professionals, aware that the public mandate is clear, want to respond. However, there is

a concern on the part of law enforcement that citizens believe that police must drop everything they are doing and respond to every report of a missing child within seconds, even the child who has a history of running away repeatedly and returns home in a short time. "That is not to say that law enforcement officials are not concerned about these children, but citizens need to be aware of priorities and that there are limited resources available in most communities," says Bestpitch.

Clearly, community law enforcement agencies are responding. Reader's Digest (1984) reported that Indianapolis has an incredible record for finding its missing children. In 1983, all 15 children who were

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Children of the Night: A Study of Adolescent Prostitution by D. Kelly Weisberg, pp. 298, \$27.00 (Hardback)
Available from: Lexington Books, D.C. Heath and Co., 125 Spring Street, Lexington, MA 02173.

Gene, a homosexual boy, started running away from home when he was 14. He eventually ran for good, and turned to prostitution in order to survive. Jack, also a homosexual, as a child was sexually abused by his grandfather and his uncle. He turned to prostitution at 19 "for the hell of it." A fourteen year old adolescent female, physically abused at home, runs away and begins prostituting herself in order to survive. These are but a few of the tragic tales one finds in *Children of the Night: A Study of Adolescent Prostitution*.

Children of the Night addresses many of the questions raised by professionals and communities concerning the problem of adolescent prostitutes, male and female. Who are these youth and why do they turn to prostitution? How does the male prostitute differ from the female? How does a community typically respond to the problem? What legislation exists to deal with the problem and the needs of the youth involved?

Weisberg's book is a must for everyone concerned about the destiny of children, especially those who are on the streets selling their bodies. This is a poignant account of their plight, as well as an honest statement about what can be done as a response.

Reviewed by C. McNulty

Missing Children: A National Tragedy continued from page 7

missing were found, and all but 43 of 1,627 runaway children were located and cases closed. Why? Because, according to police officials, these cases are top priority.

Recently, Virginia law enforcement agencies have begun coordinating efforts to provide more accurate and complete services. The Fairfax County Police Department is an example. The local board of supervisors recently approved funding for a Child Services Unit. "Up until now, we have had the Juvenile Squad investigating missing and runaway children, and the Sex Crimes Unit investigating sex crimes against children, and the Homicide Unit working on child abuse cases," explains Lt. Dave Frankel. "This funding will combine all of these into one unit and will allow us to increase from three investigators to six plus one supervisor. It will provide for better coordination of services for missing and exploited children."

If one were to report a missing child, what is likely to happen? Detective Carolyn Simmons of the Portsmouth Youth Division, Portsmouth Police Department, explains the typical procedure. First, a uniform patrol officer will respond to the call, getting as much information as possible. A local search will be conducted. At some point, a special officer, such as Simmons,

whose area of expertise is locating missing children, may need to get involved. She has a variety of options available to her and will act according to the needs of the case. She will get in touch with the NCIC and VCIN (managed by the Virginia State Police), giving information as well as checking the system for any information that may already be on file. If necessary, such as in the case of a parent abduction, highways in and out of the area will be monitored. Law enforcement officials from other communities and state police will be alerted. And, if it is deemed necessary, professionals from homicide and sex crime units may be brought in on the case. "It's complicated," she comments. "Each case will be handled according to its individual requirements."

Clearly the concern and efforts which are being made for missing children are needed. Hopefully, with the increased awareness and services provided by the state and national clearinghouses, communities will realize that the concern and efforts must be displayed for *all* missing children and their families, including the runaway.

"In order to really deal with the problem of missing children we need to keep things in perspective," Lanning summarizes.

"We must not merely think of the missing child as the six-year-old who has been stolen by the pedophile. We need to remember the child who is stolen by a non-custodial parent, and the tragic case of the homeless youth—that youth who has no home to which he can return. Possibly it's time for us to stop lumping missing children together. Maybe we need to start talking about the runaways who are missing, or the child who has been abducted by a parent, or that child who has been abducted by a stranger. However, what typically happens is that when someone wants volume, the large number which includes all missing children is quoted. When someone wants effect, the young, the stranger-abducted child who was murdered or sexually molested is discussed. I am not sure this is fair to anyone, least of all the runaway who is receiving little assistance."

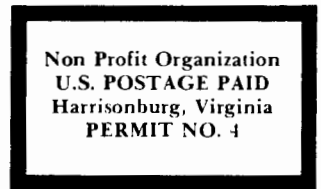
Lanning reiterates that he cares about the stranger-abducted child. "I care a great deal and want the system to do everything to prevent a stranger abduction and assist in finding these children. But, I don't want us to get so wrapped up in 'stranger danger' that we forget the children who are living on the streets because they have nowhere else to go."

References provided upon request.

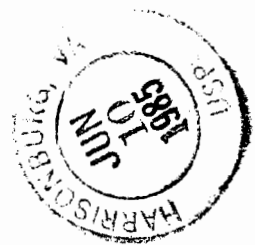


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