



AMBER Alert

Bringing Abducted Children Home



Victims' (Survivors') Roundtable Report: Summary and Key Findings

**AMBER
ALERT**

America's Missing:
Broadcast Emergency Response



Federal Programs

**January 24, 2007
San Diego, California**



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AMBER Alert Training and Technical Assistance Program

Victims' (Survivors') Roundtable Report

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The 2007 Victims' (Survivors') Roundtable Meeting resulted from critical steps being taken to improve the nation's response to victim and family survivors of missing and abducted children. The leadership from the U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, through Deputy Assistant Attorney General Cybele K. Daley and Associate Administrator for the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Ron Laney, provided the overall direction of the meeting. Key staff from Fox Valley Technical College provided key logistics and project planning. The business partners providing conference support included the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children and the Hyatt Islandia in San Diego, California.

Most importantly, we would like to acknowledge the following participants in the Victims' (Survivors') Roundtable Meeting: John Bish, Sharon Brooks, Roy Brown, Rebecca DeMauro, Alene Hayes, Maureen and Denise Himebaugh, Colleen and Taryn Nick, Elizabeth Norton Baker, Abby and Sam Potash, Joe Bill and Kathy Rogers, Erin Runnion, Carol and Lindsay Ryan, Don and Claudine Ryce, Samiah Baroni (Seramur), Ed and Lois Smart, and Bob and Gay Smither.

The success of the meeting was dependent on a unique and energetic partnership between professionals focused on the issues of victims and family survivors of missing and abducted children. It is our hope that the meeting will serve as a significant step forward in our effort to learn from our past and make improvements on the future.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Phil Keith", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Phil Keith, Program Director
AMBER Alert Training and Technical Assistance Program
Fox Valley Technical College

PREFACE

The following report summarizes the Victims' (Survivors') Roundtable Meeting held on January 24, 2007 at the Hyatt Islandia in San Diego, California. The meeting provided a forum for recovered victims of child abductions and family members of abducted children to talk about their experiences with law enforcement throughout the progression of their case. The goal was to evaluate law enforcements' response to the child abduction as well as how the family and survivors of the abduction were treated. As a result of our meeting, we expect to improve training efforts to law enforcement officers in AMBER Alert Cases, and ultimately, to improve the officers' response to child abduction cases.

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VICTIMS' (SURVIVORS') ROUNDTABLE MEETING

January 24, 2007

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Cybele K. Daley, Deputy Assistant Attorney General, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice emphasized, "our programs are shaped by victims' families."

A Victims' (Survivors') Roundtable meeting was held January 24, 2007 in San Diego, California. The meeting was designed to allow victims to meet one another and voice their experiences, concerns, and suggestions regarding the response, investigation, and prosecution of their individual cases. The objective of the session was to learn first-hand from participants how law enforcement and prosecutors could improve responses to cases of missing and abducted children.

The findings from these sessions will be used to enhance and shape the Department of Justice's training efforts regarding these types of cases and to assist in state and local policy development through the provision of technical assistance.

PRESENT AT MEETING

Cybele K. Daley, Deputy
Assistant Attorney General
Summer Larson, DOJ
Ron Laney, OJJDP

Phil Keith, Project Director
Lisa Schmid, FVTC
Mindy Hammack, FVTC
Jon Dewalt, FVTC

Nancy Sabin (non-profit
representative)
Lori St. Onge (non-profit
representative)

Victim-Survivor Families

John Bish
Sharon Brooks
Roy Brown
Rebecca DeMauro
Alene Hayes

Maureen & Denise
Himebaugh
Colleen and Taryn Nick
Elizabeth Norton Baker
Abby & Sam Potash
Joe Bill and Kathy Rogers

Erin Runnion
Carol and Lindsay Ryan
Don & Claudine Ryce
Samiah Baroni (Seramur)
Ed & Lois Smart
Bob & Gay Smithers

MEETING OVERVIEW

The meeting began with a welcome and introductions, followed by an overview of the AMBER Alert Initiative of the Department of Justice (DOJ) including their key plan and strategies. In addition, there was an AMBER Alert Overview that included an explanation of the program's Mission and Strategy.

Brief discussions were led by:

- DOJ, OJP Deputy Assistant Attorney General Cybele K. Daley
- Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) Associate Administrator Ron Laney
- FVTC staff participants

Key points of these discussions included:

- AMBER Alert training reaches 6,000 -10,000 professionals annually
- DOJ continues to make progress on efforts to create/enhance a seamless network of AMBER Alert Plans, responses and awareness to child abduction cases; all 50 states and 66 local and regional jurisdictions are involved in AMBER Alert planning
- Victim (Survivor) feedback is highly valued and continues to be important in dealing with abductions cases
- A Sibling Guide is in development to help siblings in dealing with their family, friends and social settings during these trying times
- Local and federal law enforcement partnerships and Child Abduction Response Team (CART) training for our neighboring countries
- Wireless AMBER Alerts
- The development efforts of Amber Alert in Indian Country
- Project Safe Childhood
- Human Trafficking
- DOJ Training Programs including the AMBER Alert, Internet Crimes Against Children, Child Protection Programs and the development of the President's DNA Initiative in Cold Case/Unidentified Missing Investigations

Representatives from DOJ and FVTC requested input from the participants on a number of activities, strategies and programs currently being provided by the Office of Justice Programs (OJP).

The remainder of the session was devoted to learning from victim/surviving family members and child victims. Specifics of each case were captured for use in training sessions and policy recommendations by DOJ staff. Victim/surviving family members' observations, comments and recommendations are provided in pages 3-5.

CENTRAL THEMES/ISSUES AS DISCUSSED BY VICTIM FAMILIES

- **PARENT PREFERENCE**
 1. Parents would prefer to undergo a polygraph early in cases so they could be eliminated from being suspects and be better informed about the status of the case.
 2. Law enforcement should explain the process to parents early on in the investigation and should explain why parents are normally considered suspects.
- **FIRST IMPRESSIONS OF LAW ENFORCEMENT AND FIRST RESPONDERS**
 1. The priority of missing, endangered children is relatively low in law enforcement.
 2. First responding officers were not overly concerned, often suggesting the child would likely return.
 3. First responders were clearly not prepared to respond to cases involving abduction, often delaying the investigation until additional resources arrived at the scene of reporting/abduction.
 4. Often times, first responders suggest a waiting period rather than responding immediately to the incident in a more appropriate manner.

- **POINT OF CONTACT BETWEEN FAMILIES AND LAW ENFORCEMENT**
 1. From the beginning of the incident, the law enforcement points of contact change for the parent. The initial responding officer is replaced by another person that may only work a single shift.
 2. Changes in law enforcement personnel confuse the victim parents.
 3. Representatives from local and federal agencies have different approaches that confuse the victim parents.
 4. Federal representatives engage and disengage with victim parents and are less than sensitive to the families.

- **COMMUNICATION**
 1. Law enforcement response goes from little or no response to over response
 2. The family is not always advised of what is happening.

- **COORDINATION AND COOPERATION**
 1. Agencies failed to coordinate efforts, withholding information from the other agency. Federal agencies often did not advise local law enforcement of tactics and efforts; in some cases federal agency representatives were viewed as being less than truthful.
 2. Law enforcement and prosecutors do not coordinate their efforts, particularly regarding what is released to the public at the conclusion or charging point in the case. In a number of cases, specifics about sexual assaults were released by the law enforcement or prosecutor spokespersons inappropriately.

- **INSENSITIVITY AND DISHONESTY IN LAW ENFORCEMENT AND DISTRICT ATTORNEYS' OFFICES**
 1. Missing children are a low priority to most law enforcement and prosecutors.
 2. In more than a few cases, prosecutors were less than honest in the deliberations with the family. Prosecutors provided conflicting views to that of law enforcement.
 3. Sensitivity to the family and the dynamics of abductions were not understood by prosecutors or were disregarded.
 4. Law enforcement representatives were less than honest with responses to parent-victims.

- **ENHANCED CART TRAINING**
 1. Child Abduction Response Team training should be mandatory for law enforcement and prosecutors.
 2. Agencies regardless of size should be proficient in responding to missing or abducted children, including searches and forensic responses.
 3. Responders failed to search adequately to find missing children. Often the searches were “ad hoc”; not organized or very limited.
 4. Forensic evidence efforts were for the most part delayed significantly or did not occur.

- **AFTER CARE/COUNSELING OF FAMILY MEMBERS AND RECOVERED CHILDREN**

1. Every law enforcement agency and prosecutor should know what services are available to victims and victim families. While they do not need to provide the after care service, they should be responsible for seeing services are provided.
2. Coordination between prosecutors, law enforcement and state agencies in providing victim services is rare and seems non-existent.

- **MEDIA LIAISON NEEDS FOR FAMILIES**

1. Families need a liaison with the media as parents are not prepared for what happens. During the critical first hours and throughout the investigation, victim parents need to have someone they can rely on to represent the family.
2. Manuals and written guides are useful, however, during a crisis situation parent victims have limited time to read a guide or manual on what actions to take regarding abductions.
3. Law enforcement and prosecutors could assist in identifying spokespersons for families and coaching spokespersons on how to respond to media inquiries.

- **JURISDICTIONAL ISSUES**

1. Victim parents should be made aware of jurisdictional issues and what types of decisions must be made to maintain the integrity of the case.
2. As jurisdictional issues arise, victim parents should be made aware of why a federal agency is handling a particular case or aspect thereof versus a local agency, which may be closer to the case and family.

- **MODEL STATE STATUTES**

1. States should have provisions to assist families victimized by child abductions. Victim services should be enhanced to assist in covering the cost of after care for children and families.
2. Consistency in state statutes on missing children, runaways, and abductions should be required to enhance the view of cases.
3. State should mandate child abduction response teams and abducted child investigation training.
4. State should focus on missing children of all types and mandate law enforcement training.



National AMBER Alert Initiative Training and Technical Assistance Program

Victims' Roundtable Agenda

Welcome and Introductions

Phil Keith, Project Director, AMBER Alert Training and Technical Assistance
Fox Valley Technical College

Introduction of Host

Ron Laney, Associate Administrator, Child Protection Division Office of Juvenile Justice and
Delinquency prevention

Cybele K. Daley, Deputy Assistant Attorney General
Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs

Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs

- Current OJP Initiatives and Programs
- AMBER Alert Training and Technical Assistance
- Internet Crimes Against Children
- Child Protection Programs
- Project Safe Childhood
- Native American Programs
- Human Trafficking and Child Prostitution
- SMART Office
- Training and Technical Assistance

Mission and Outcomes of Roundtable

- Law Enforcement Responses
- Public Education
- Partnerships, Non-Profit organizations, Others

Open Forum

Roundtable Wrap Up

Closing Remarks