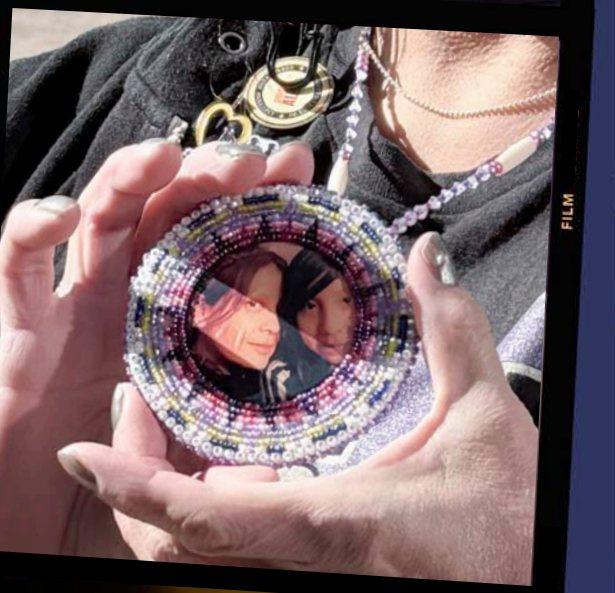
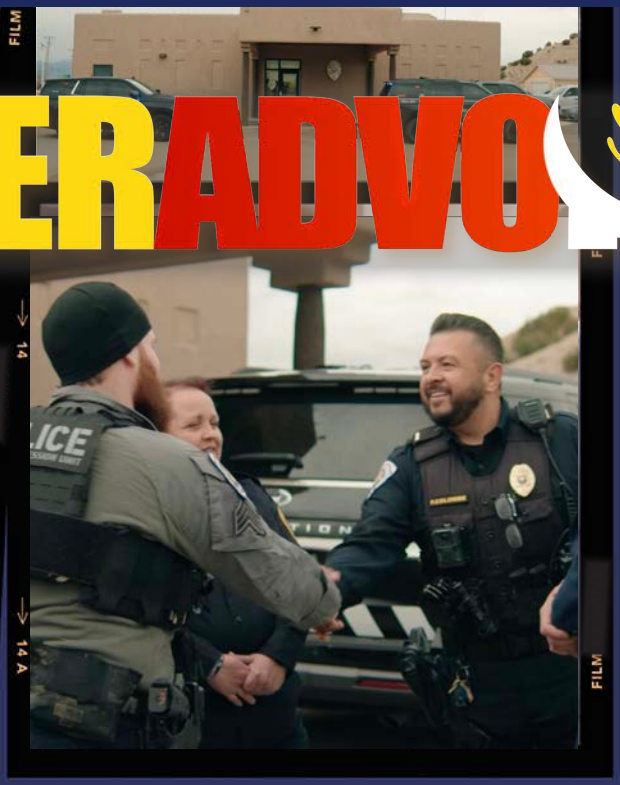
THE AMBER ADVOCATE

2025 ISSUE 3

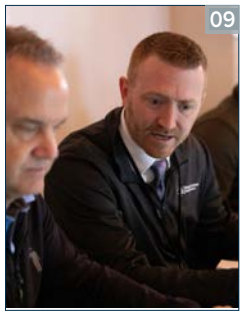


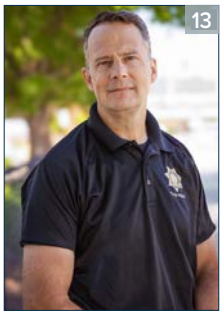


AMBER Alert in Indian Country

IN FOCUS

A new AMBER Alert in Indian Country video, directed by an Indigenous filmmaker, unites Tribal child protection officials from across the nation.





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LET'S CONNECT

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AMBERAdvocate.org/aiic

EDITORS' NOTES

In the print edition, words and phrases in **bold purple** denote hyperlinks for content sources and additional details. To interact with hyperlinks, visit **AMBERAdvocate.org** to download a PDF of current and past issues.

Have a story idea for us?
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COVER**STORY**

By Denise Gee Peacock

"Ashlynne's love is like a bright light that shines over Indian Country. It has caused me to move mountains."

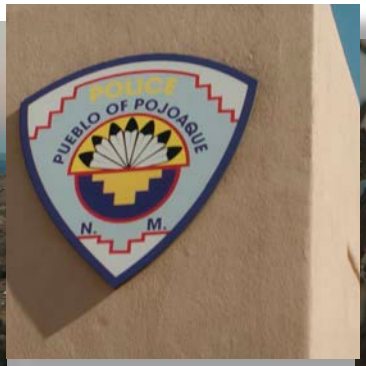
– Pamela Foster, mother of Ashlynne Mike (2004–2016)

Our children are the heart of our communities—the keeper of our legacies. But sometimes the unthinkable happens. A child goes missing. And in those desperate moments, every second counts. So do AMBER Alerts. Thus begins a new eight-minute AMBER Alert in Indian Country-focused video filmed in Santa Fe. It is the longest of three videos that focus

Continues on page 4

Help, Unity & Hope in focus

A new video project about AMBER Alert in Indian Country has U.S. Tribal child protection leaders calling for enhanced training and collaboration to help save lives.



"Words like 'sovereignty' and 'jurisdiction' have almost become taboo. But any child who is missing should be the priority. It doesn't matter where the resources are coming from. Let's locate that child.

Jada Breaux, *above*, Captain, Chitimacha Tribal Police (Louisiana)

on AMBER Alert being a lifeline—a rapid response system that mobilizes entire communities to help find missing and abducted children quickly and safely.

In Indian Country, implementing AMBER Alert comes with unique challenges: jurisdictional rights, infrastructure and resources limitations, crime reporting complexities, and the need for cultural understanding and multiagency collaboration.

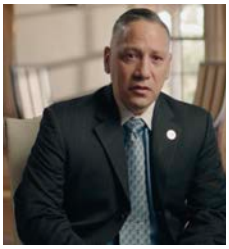
The AMBER Alert in Indian Country (**AIIC**) initiative—part of the AMBER Alert Training & Technical Assistance Program (AATTAP) of the National Criminal Justice Training Center (NCJTC) of Fox Valley Technical College—is a bridge meant to overcome such issues.

Watch the videos by clicking here or visiting AMBER Advocate.org/AIIC.

"We all have a role to play in protecting our children," says NCJTC Director and AATTAP Administrator Janell Rasmussen. "By working together, we can ensure that every community in Indian Country has the resources and support they need to implement AMBER Alert effectively."

The goal of the new video (one of three in total) and AIIC training, is to:

- Cultivate awareness and build knowledge of available resources and support systems for Indian Country.
- Encourage American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN) communities to implement effective response plans.
- Help Tribes understand the basics of the AMBER Alert system and evaluate their community's preparedness.
- Promote the relationship-building between AI/AN, state agencies, and law enforcement. *Continues on page 6*



"When missing children go silent, it's a scream you cannot hear. Reach out to the AMBER Alert in Indian Country program now to be prepared.

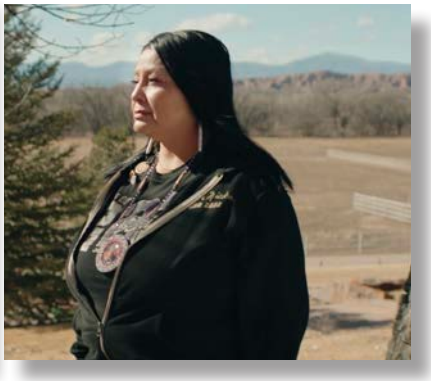
Joshua Keliikoa, *left*, Public Safety Manager, Rincon Band of Luiseño Indians (California)

Above: *Captain Jada Breaux with Louisiana's Chitimacha Tribe greets Tribal law enforcement arriving from other states.*
Above right: *The AATTAP-AIIC team, visiting law enforcement, and principals with the film company Bravebird enjoy some down time after the first day of production work.*

Opener photo, page 3: *Smudging tools were used to bless the video project in Santa Fe.*
Bottom right photo, page 4: *The 6 AM Marketing team monitors visual and audio progress.*

"How can we protect our children? How can we ensure the best response is made when a child is missing or kidnapped?

Jenelle Roybal, *above and left*, Governor, Pueblo of Pojoaque (New Mexico)



“Ashlynne made it possible for Tribes to implement an AMBER Alert system. Now it’s up to Tribes to make it happen.

Pamela Foster, *above*, mother of Ashlynne Mike (2004-2016) and an advocate for AMBER Alert in Indian Country

- Emphasize the need for cultural awareness in handling missing/abducted children cases.
- Build agency among AI/AN communities to take proactive measures to safeguard their children—and their children’s children.

The AATTAP-AIIC team worked with two Indigenous filmmakers who form the heart of **Bravebird**, a company that regularly collaborates with the nationally respected marketing firm **6 AM**. Both firms are based in Wisconsin, and both “were perfect to work with based on their understanding of the sensitivity of this story,” says Tyesha M. Wood, Program Manager for AATTAP’s AMBER Alert in Indian Country initiative. “We wanted to bring together voices of child protection officials from Tribes across the nation—law enforcement leaders and others who could feel comfortable in expressing what their concerns are and how the AMBER Alert in Indian Country program has helped them. And how it can help others too,” Wood says.

A MOTHER’S LOVE FOR ASHLYNNE

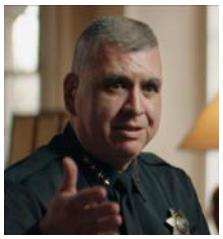
Read about Pamela Foster’s unwavering determination to bring AMBER Alert to Indian Country here.

The video was filmed on the Pueblo of Pojoaque reservation, known to have existed since 500 AD. The New Mexico Tribe played host to the video’s participants, who came from northern California, south Louisiana, northern Florida, and all points in between.

AIIC’s main champion in the video series is Pamela Foster, who figured prominently in the first video produced for the initiative after passage of the Ashlynne Mike AMBER Alert in Indian Country Act of 2018. Foster is the mother of Ashlynne, who on May 2, 2016, was abducted—along with her brother Ian—and murdered in a remote area on the Navajo Nation. Ian managed to escape and run several miles to seek help. But while Ashlynne’s parents made frantic

“Just because nothing’s happened doesn’t mean it won’t. The wolf is at the door. And we need to help each other or we won’t solve this problem.

Laurie Gonzalez, *left,* Councilwoman, Rincon Band of Luiseño Indians (California)

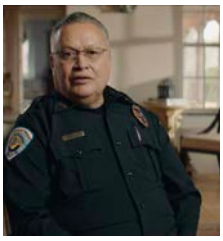


“You don’t have to do it alone. Tribes across the U.S. are willing to share what works in getting AMBER Alert in Indian Country.

Greg O’Rourke, *left,* Chief, Yurok Tribal Police Department (California)

KNOWLEDGE IS POWER
Understand the ways AATTAP's AMBER Alert in Indian Country initiative can enhance Tribal response capacities for finding missing and endangered children by clicking **here**.

Members of the AATTAP-AIIC team, and dozens of others from across the nation, were on hand to produce the video, which promotes the advantages of AMBER Alert in Indian Country.

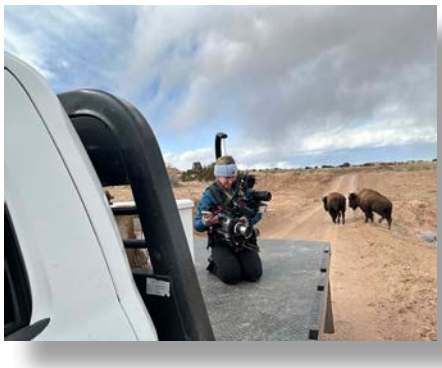


"AMBER Alert is the safety net for our children in danger. It's our job and our responsibility to fight for them and be their voice.

Freddie Trujillo, *left*, Chief, Pueblo of Pojoaque Police (New Mexico)

"Being fortunate doesn't alleviate the responsibility of having a comprehensive plan for prevention and response in place.

Taylor Patterson, *left*, Deputy Chief, Miccosukee Police Department (Florida)



"When a child goes missing I can see the hurt in their family's eyes. That empowers our team to work quickly, and diligently, on their behalf.

Nathan Barton, Major, Pueblo of of Pojoaque Police Department (New Mexico)

"Although we are many nations, we are one in this commitment.

Tyesha M. Wood, AATTAP Program Manager, AMBER Alert in Indian Country

efforts to locate her, misunderstandings and jurisdictional hurdles on the reservation prevented an AMBER Alert from being issued until the next day, robbing authorities of critical hours in their search efforts.

"On that day, a part of me died, and life has never been the same," Foster says. But it also propelled her to lobby for legislative change that would prevent another Tribal family from experiencing what hers did.

"I made a promise to Ashlynne that I would do my part to fix the loophole that exists in the system," Foster says. "I would fight with every fiber of my being to bring AMBER Alert to Indian Country."

The video underscores the urgency of implementing AMBER Alerts through the lens of law enforcement professionals and others working on the front lines of protecting Tribal children and others.

"For far too long, an epidemic has been playing out in Indian Country as it relates to missing and murdered Indigenous children, adults, wives, relatives, brothers, and fathers. And it is a monster," says Major Nathan Barton of the Pueblo of Pojoaque Police Department.

Foster makes a direct appeal to Tribal leaders. "If you haven't already received the AIIC training, please reach out. Thanks to Ashlynne's law, we can work with you to establish an AMBER Alert plan," she says. "What's more, the training is free and accessible, and it's adaptive to your needs. We just need more Tribal participation for this to be effective."

Bravebird: 'Telling stories with dignity'

Film director Alex Miranda *(above left)* and producer Tim Peters *(back row, center)* are the principals of **Bravebird,** an Indigenous-led filmmaking group that specializes in telling the stories of Indian Country.

"For us, and our families and communities, it's important to tell the stories with care, authenticity, and dignity," Miranda says.

One aspect of their work that shines through: "The land. Mother Earth," Miranda says. "She helps us realize that stories such as Ashlynne's will never be forgotten."

More in Focus
Click **here** to see a slideshow of photos related to this story.

ACTION ITEMS:

- Learn more about how AMBER Alert can protect Tribal children. Visit **AMBERAdvocate.org/AIIC** or email **AskAMBER@fvtc.edu** for more information.
- Follow **AMBER Alert in Indian Country courses** online, including the comprehensive **MCI-IC series**.
- Contact your local Tribal leaders to discuss the importance of having an AMBER Alert response plan in place.

By Jody Garlock

Mission: Rescue

A groundbreaking rescue operation in Upstate New York locates more than 60 missing children and shows the power of agencies uniting for a common goal.

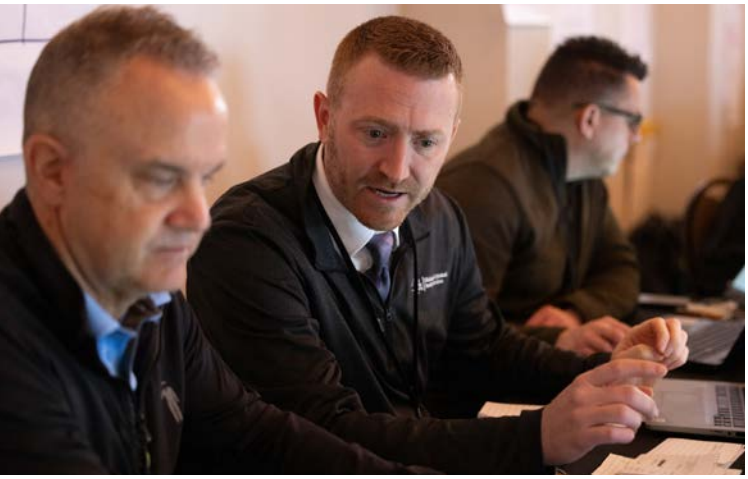
It's an early morning in March, and about 100 law enforcement officials, social services professionals, legal experts, and others are gathered in a hotel ballroom in Latham, New York. Wearing lanyards with name tags and sitting at tables with laptops and papers in front of them, they seem poised for a routine conference. But there's a seriousness in the air and laser focus as they work on their computers or huddle into small groups.

Eventually, the ringing of a bell sounds across the room. Heads turn toward a man holding a brass school bell as the realization sets in: A missing child has been located.

By the end of the three-day Capital Region Missing Child Rescue Operation, that bell will have been rung an impressive 63 times. Simultaneously, a computer screen projected onto a wall showed the number in big, bold lettering. Both served as uplifting motivators for the agencies and experts who united for a goal of finding missing children at risk of endangerment, exploitation, or harm. "After the first or second bell ring, everyone gets it—it's powerful," says Tim Williams, manager of the

Above: *Intelligence Analyst Joy Johnston of the New York State Police answers questions during a rescue operation to locate children reported missing as runaways.*

Below: *Tim Williams, center, manager of the New York State Missing Persons Clearinghouse (NYSMP) checks progress with David Fallon, retired FBI investigator.* ***Right:*** *Alan Lapage, NYSMPC investigative supervisor, rings a bell to signal a missing child was safely located.*



New York State Missing Persons Clearinghouse (**NYSMPC**), one of organizers. "You could feel the energy in the room continue to increase."

More than 60 local, state, and federal law enforcement agencies, nonprofit organizations, and private partners came together to explore new leads, review case notes, and leverage technology to find at-risk youth reported missing as runaways.

The 63 children and teens located during the first-ever **rescue operation** for the Albany, Schenectady, and Troy areas ranged in age from 2 to 17 years old when they were reported missing, and from 6 to 22 when found, according to the New York State Division of Criminal Justice Services (DCJS). And the overall number of those safely located continued to climb, as work that was started wrapped up after the event. Williams says 71 missing children have now been located as a direct result of the rescue operation.

"These are emotional events," says Kevin Branzetti, CEO of the National Child Protection Task Force (NCPTF), which partnered with NYSMPC on the operation and has similar recovery missions scheduled in other states.

"We know these cases can be emotional roller coasters. You see a lot of tears."

To drive home the importance of such ventures, Branzetti and Williams point to statistics. At the end of 2024, New York had slightly more than 1,000 active missing children cases. The majority of the 12,000-plus cases annually—95 percent—are reported as runaways.

"Every missing child is an endangered missing child," Williams says. "Our focus was the runaway population because it's often overlooked."

Strategic Teamwork

The Capital Region event grew out of training sessions between NYSMPC and the Arkansas-based **NCPTF**. "We started to think 'Could we put all these people in the same room with the sole mission of finding kids and closing cases?'" Williams says.

In October 2024, NYSMPC and NCPTF spearheaded their first joint rescue operation. That venture in the **Buffalo area** safely located 47 children reported missing as runways. Branzetti and Clearinghouse staffers, including Williams and Cindy Neff, who recently retired as NYSMPC manager *(see sidebar,*

Madeline Hehir of New York's Office of Children and Family Services takes notes during a conversation with the National Child Protection Task Force's Al Rollins and Melissa Kaiser.

page 12), applied lessons they learned from the Buffalo operation. Comparatively, the Capital Region operation was more complex, involving coordination among three police departments, three district attorney's offices, and three county social services agencies, along with many other entities.

"One of the most critical components is securing full buy-in from local partners, law enforcement, social services, district attorneys, and child advocacy centers," Neff says. "Their collaboration is essential because these operations go beyond just locating missing youth. It's also about understanding the underlying reasons they went missing and identifying the support needed to help prevent it from happening again."

The Capital Region operation required months of planning and meetings to review cases with agencies and coordinate logistics. Participants were ultimately organized into four teams—two for Albany and one each for Schenectady and Troy. A pre-operation meeting was held for all the teams prior to the operation.

Each team had a similar composition: a Clearinghouse representative who acted as the organizer, a crime analyst who had access to local police records, at least one detective from the agency working the case, representatives from NCTPF and the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children (NCMEC), a probation official, someone from social services, and various other law enforcement officials. The goal was to ensure that each team had a variety of resources and skill sets, be it public records searching, tracking a cell phone, understanding social media work, or open-source intelligence. "No two police departments have the same sets of tools," Branzetti says. "Everyone brings their tools to the game, and we get to share them."

Adding a social services component—and having those professionals in the room prepared to go out when a child was recovered—was one of the lessons learned from the prior operation. Branzetti, Williams, and Neff note that the goal wasn't just to find the child, but also to try to ensure the child doesn't go missing again. "What we promote deeply is 'Find. Listen. Help,'" Branzetti says. "It takes more than police to do that. It's a society problem."

The state's Office of Children and Family Services coordinated with nonprofit organizations and victim assistance programs to assist the investigations and provide services and support for recovered children. "There was a whole support-service

> "Every time a child runs away, it's a cry for help. That child is screaming out for our help, and it's our job to do something.
>
> **Kevin Branzetti**
> *(shown above)*
> CEO, National Child Protection Task Force

Left: *Samuel Lizzio and Mark Baney, New York State Police senior investigators, work a case. In 2024, New York closed 12,310 cases involving children reported missing as runaways, according to the Division of Criminal Justice Services.*

WEB EXTRA!

This rescue operation capped Cindy Neff's long career in helping children. In April, Neff retired from the New York State Missing Persons Clearinghouse, where she worked for 20 years, the past 11 as manager. She encourages clearinghouse managers and AMBER Alert Coordinators to carry on the mission on behalf of missing children by regularly assessing priorities, and building strong partnerships. "This work cannot be done in isolation," she says. Read the **story** "Empathy & Respect" about Neff *(pictured below)* on the *AMBER Advocate* website.

side of this ready to go and available—and put into action many times," Williams says. If a child already had an assigned case worker, that person was notified.

A unique component was providing gift cards to ensure a child or teen had essentials, such as food, clothing, or haircare services. In some cases, the gift cards became an outreach opportunity for the social services worker to schedule a follow-up to take a teen shopping. "We wanted her to see that something is different today," says Branzetti, whose organization secured donations to provide the gift cards. "We wanted her to understand that this isn't the same old story. It's about changing the trajectory."

Additionally, the rescue operation also helps destigmatize the word "runaway." "It's a matter of changing the mindset of what that means," Williams says. "Everyone in the room is getting a better sense of the word as they work on the cases and realize that we can't treat a runaway as 'I'll get to it when I get to it' and instead say 'Let's make sure we're doing something.'"

'Remarkable' Collaboration

Heading into the rescue operation, the organizers didn't have a set goal for the number of children they wanted to find. "If we can find even one missing child, that's a positive," Williams says. Because team members had started pre-work, some of the cases were able to be swiftly closed. A side benefit, Branzetti says, is that the rescue operation helps broaden or hone skills, and participants leave with added knowledge they can apply to their own cases. "These rescue operations turn into partial training events," he says. "You actually may be writing a first search warrant or doing a first cell tower dump, or someone is walking you through how to track an IP address. You can't beat that."

The organizers also note that it's heartening to see the camaraderie develop on the mixed teams, where members typically start out the rescue operation as strangers.

Williams says the operation proved to him how beneficial it is to bring together diverse groups. "We all tend to fall into the silo that we're comfortable in, but we hear so many times, 'Oh I wish I had reached out to you sooner,'" he says. "Sitting down at the same table, talking through cases, and sharing resources that are available is so important. Don't be afraid to have those difficult conversations or continue to talk weekly or monthly to stay on top of things."

For Neff, the rescue operation was a gratifying culmination to her long career. "When professionals from different agencies are brought together in the same room with a shared mission," she says, "remarkable things can happen."

FACES

By Denise Gee Peacock

Pedal to the metal for missing children

Lieutenant Chris O'Keefe of the Tulsa, Oklahoma, Police Department (TPD) has a handful of cameo appearances in the reality-crime TV series "The First 48." But off screen, the real-life search for bad actors and innocent victims has been his calling for several decades.

Much of O'Keefe's 24-year TPD career has focused on the rapid identification and apprehension of homicide suspects and other violent criminals, most recently in the TPD's Fugitive Warrants Unit. In April 2023 he began supervising the TPD's Sex and Violent Offender Registration Unit, where he also serves as AMBER Alert Coordinator (AAC). As AAC, O'Keefe weighs missing child-related factors as they are known before deciding whether to contact Jason Matheson of the Oklahoma Highway Patrol to initiate an AMBER Alert in partnership with the Oklahoma State Bureau of Investigation.

We met the De Pere, Wisconsin, native at this year's AMBER Alert and AMBER Alert in Indian Country Symposium in Washington, D.C. We reconnected with him in Tulsa to discuss his work.

Lieutenant Chris O'Keefe

What led you into law enforcement?
I knew I wanted to get into public service, something to help people on a daily basis. Maybe I just read too many superhero comic books as a kid. But after getting a B.A. in sociology from St. Norbert College in De Pere, I did some law enforcement training at Fox Valley Technical College (FVTC) in Appleton before joining the U.S. Army. Then, when my wife was offered a job in Tulsa, I tapped into my FVTC training and Army experience to sign up for the TPD academy. I joined the organization in 2001.

How does being an AAC mesh with the other work you do for the TPD?
It's a natural fit. An AMBER Alert is essentially a manhunt, and I've developed an expertise

As the father of two teen-age boys, Lieutenant Chris O'Keefe recognizes that "every child deserves to be safe," he says. "No matter the circumstances, when they go missing, they are profoundly vulnerable, and need to be found quickly."

in finding people. Now I oversee the process after countless directives to "Go, go, go—find them!" I also manage the sex offender registration process, and those are the individuals we look at right away whenever there's a missing child case.

> **Parental abductions are the most common and complex. We have to be careful with custody disputes—unless the parent indicates he might hurt the child. At that point, an AMBER Alert would be clear.**
>
> **Lieutenant Chris O'Keefe**
> Tulsa Police Department
> Sex and Violent Offender Registration Supervisor/AMBER Alert Coordinator

How many AMBER Alerts do you issue on average?

In the last two years, we've issued about six AMBER Alerts. But I couldn't even begin to count the number of times we've discussed if a missing child case should warrant an AMBER Alert, or an Endangered Missing Alert, or be addressed some other way.

See Lt. O'Keefe in 'The First 48'
Click **here** for S17/E29 and **here** for S21/E1.

What are your biggest challenges?

One involves a perception that if we don't issue an alert, we're ignoring the situation. But truth is, we bring plenty of resources to bear to find a child. This was a topic of conversation at the recent AMBER Alert and AMBER Alert in Indian Country Symposium. There's a lot we can do if a case doesn't meet our criteria—issue social media posts, work with license plate readers, ping a cell phone. The case can get resolved even quicker if we have solid information to work with right away.

What guides your ultimate decision?

I go by informed instinct, combining that with what I hear from people on the front lines—particularly the responding officers or in some cases our dispatchers, digging into what their first impression of the situation is, and whether they believe the child to be in danger. That's why first-responder training is essential.

Do you enlist a child abduction response team (CART)?

We have a call tree of people on our incident management team (IMT) who are paged during an AMBER Alert or Endangered Missing situation, and the IMT includes a crisis unit that focuses on child molestation cases. They're truly an organizational force. We have an AMBER Alert Center within our headquarters and the IMT will use it as its command post, manning the phones, sorting through tips, procuring resources. All the tips flow through me and I decide the priority of them. We then keep track of who we've sent where to check out the tip, and I organize all that. We also try to keep the family as close as possible and have a victim advocate on hand.

What types of missing child cases are the most complex?

Stranger abductions—the real nightmare ones, with no information on vehicles or suspects—are thankfully very rare. Parental abductions are the most common—and complicated. Generally, a parent can't abduct

Above: *Chris O'Keefe appeared in several episodes of the A&E series "The First 48" driving fast, procuring warrants, and arresting violent criminals. Because of his expertise he's now a driving instructor for the Tulsa Police Department (TPD). "It can be a little hairy sometimes teaching other people how to drive fast when you're sitting in the passenger seat."* ***Opposite page:*** *O'Keefe discusses an arrest warrant with his TPD colleagues.*

their child if they have the legal right to be with that child, whether all the time or just some of the time. It's only when the parent says they're going to go harm themselves and/or the child that we immediately know it warrants an AMBER Alert.

What helps you navigate such complexities?

If there's even a chance that a parent could hurt the child, we'll err on the side of caution and issue an AMBER Alert. The challenge lies within the legalities. We worry about unleashing the full force of law enforcement on a parent who hasn't committed any crime. That can result in liability issues. And that's where our training and experience have to come into play—and asking the right questions.

> "If it were our child who was missing, we would want everyone available doing everything possible.
>
> **Chris O'Keefe**

Being an AAC is stressful work. What motivates or inspires you?

The times we've had AMBER Alerts I'm never short of help. It's not just from the people on call; we see that every patrol officer is going to stop what they're doing to help find the child. I also get calls from the regional sheriff's department, Oklahoma Highway Patrol, FBI, and the U.S. Marshals. It's amazing. I'm also grateful to have a family that's been supportive of my work.

TACTICAL TIP

"The U.S. Marshals are a great resource," says O'Keefe, who has served on several U.S. Marshals Service (USMS) task forces. "At the recent [National AMBER Alert] symposium, Bill Boldin explained how they're using their fugitive-search skills to find missing children. I hope people use them more. They're always quick to offer their help to us, especially when we lack resources to conduct out-of-state investigations."

NEWS BRIEFS

UNITED STATES

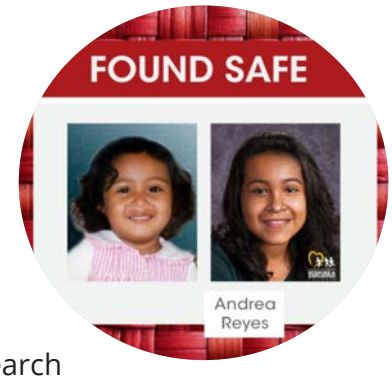
Security camera captures thwarted abduction

More than a dozen Good Samaritans are being called heroes after rescuing two children, ages 2 and 6 months, and their mother, from a vehicle fleeing a Jacksonville, Florida, parking lot. Video **footage** released by the Jacksonville Sheriff's Office (JSO) shows bystanders rushing forward and safely pulling the woman and a child, who were being dragged by the vehicle, and the other child from the SUV. Witnesses provided a detailed vehicle description that led to the driver's arrest at a shopping center. "The situation could have ended in tragedy," a JSO social media post stated. "Your JSO is grateful for the quick action and bravery of the Good Samaritans who stepped up." The driver, Yanni Human, 26, faces multiple felony charges including child abuse and false imprisonment.

Texas event provides resources for families

For 11 years, "Missing in Southeast Texas Day" has been bringing resources to families with missing loved ones. During this year's **event** in Houston, dozens of families made connections with law enforcement, social services, and forensics experts dedicated to locating missing persons. Family members were able to provide DNA samples, enter **information** into the National Missing & Unidentified Persons System (NamUs), and file photos and other identifying documents. Texas Center for the Missing organizers say the goal is to reduce the number of individuals buried as unknowns due to lack of a missing person report and give families closure. The Houston Police Department and Harris County Sheriff's Office were among the partners of the free event.

Abducted toddler found alive after 25 years



"No cold case is ever truly closed." So said New Haven, Connecticut, Police Chief Karl Jacobson in crediting officers and detectives for their diligence in reinvestigating the cold case of a toddler **abducted** by her mother. For 25 years, officers knew Andrea Michelle Reyes only by a **photo** of a smiling dark-haired child in a pink-checked outfit. Reyes was about 2 years old and under custody of her father when her mother abducted her, then was suspected of fleeing to Mexico. Two years ago, Detective Kealyn Nivakoff began to **reinvestigate** the case. Through interviews, search warrants, and social media, she was able to connect with Reyes in the Mexican city of Puebla. Subsequently, Reyes contacted the man she believed to be her father, who had searched tirelessly for her since the 1999 abduction. Advanced DNA testing confirmed the familial relationship. An arrest warrant for the mother, Rosa Tenorio, remains valid in the United States; she is believed to be in Mexico.

Lost Person Behavior expert discusses wooded searches after two girls go missing

A search for two young siblings missing in a heavily wooded area near their Nova Scotia home prompted the Canadian Broadcast Corporation to tap Robert Koester, author and app creator of *Lost Person Behavior,* for insight on what search-and-rescue teams face. Koester, who is also a search mission coordinator with the Virginia Department of Emergency Management, said the first thing searchers need to consider are the basics of a solid investigation, such as the child's age, scenario, timeline, and what caused them to go missing. Searchers can apply that information to **statistics** to identify high probability areas. For example, half of lost 4- to 6-year-olds—the ages of the missing siblings—are typically found less than one-half mile away, Koester said. Among his insights: Be aware that a child may not shout back when a searcher is shouting their name and may actively hide because they may be afraid or think they're in trouble. Thick underbrush "may look impenetrable to you as the adult searcher standing up at five feet. But if you're down at between one and three feet, you may see a way to scramble underneath … So all those places need to be searched," Koester said.

State Department releases annual report on International Parental Child Abduction

Law enforcement officials wanting to stay updated on the issue of International Parental Child Abduction (IPCA) can glean the latest information from the U.S. Department of State's 2025 **annual report**. The report, which was submitted to Congress, discusses compliance with The **Hague Convention** on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction. That treaty provides a framework for cooperation between countries to promptly return a child wrongfully removed or retained across international borders and to help ensure custody rights. The report uses standards set by the Sean and David Goldman International Child Abduction Prevention and Return Act of 2014 (known as **"the Goldman Act"**) to evaluate countries on their performance. A foreword in the report notes that Georgia was welcomed as a new treaty partner in 2024.

New protocols lauded, credited for solving missing persons cases in Guyana

Changes in how the Guyana Police Force responds to missing persons reports are delivering results, with a stepped-up focus on children. Three missing persons cases were reported to be **resolved** about a week after new emergency protocols went into effect in late April. The revised procedures enable a faster, more coordinated national response to missing persons reports. Reports involving missing children are automatically categorized as high risk and automatically trigger a "Red Alert" that activates a coordinated national response. All missing persons cases now receive **immediate** response, eliminating the 24-hour waiting period previously in place. Additionally, police officers work closely with the Guyana's Child Care and Protection Agency and other key entities. The changes stem from an 11-year-old girl's drowning in a hotel swimming pool.

Arizona, New Mexico approve 'Turquoise Alert'

The disappearance and murder of a 14-year-old girl prompted Arizona lawmakers to pass **"Emily's Law,"** establishing a new emergency alert for missing Indigenous persons. The Arizona Legislature had been considering a "Turquoise Alert" system when Emily Pike, a San Carlos Apache teen, was found murdered after she was reported missing from a group home in late January. Her case prompted lawmakers to amend the original bill to include minors under the age of 18 and name the legislation in her memory. "We cannot let children go missing without somebody being alerted," said Rep. Teresa Martinez, the bill's sponsor. The Arizona measure follows closely on the heels of a "Turquoise Alert" the **New Mexico** Legislature unanimously passed. The alerts, which function similar to an AMBER Alert, provide a rapid response when an Indigenous person is reported missing and there is evidence of imminent danger. **Washington**, California, and Colorado have similar alerts

FBI surges resources in 'Operation Not Forgotten'

The FBI is surging resources to investigate unsolved cases in Indian Country, including those relating to missing and murdered Indigenous persons (MMIP). As part of "Operation Not Forgotten," 60 FBI agents will be temporarily **deployed** to 10 field offices nationwide to work in partnership with the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) and Tribal law enforcement agencies across jurisdictions. The BIA's Missing and Murdered Unit and the FBI will use advanced forensic technology in their efforts. The FBI's Indian Country program had about 4,300 open investigations at the beginning of fiscal year 2025. U.S. Attorney General Pamela Bondi said that the collaboration will "help deliver the accountability that these communities deserve." This is the third deployment under the operation, which has provided investigative support to more than 500 cases in the past two years and resulted in the recovery of 10 child victims and 52 arrests. Frank Star Comes Out, President of the Oglala Sioux Tribe in South Dakota, said he welcomes the additional **resources**, but added "we're not done yet."

Diné task force undertakes training

The Missing & Murdered Diné Relatives (MMDR) Task Force continues to ramp up training initiatives as part of its strategy to combat the crisis of missing and murdered people across Navajo Nation. The Arizona group recently met with representatives of AMBER Alert in Indian Country (AIIC), part of the AMBER Alert Training & Technical Assistance Program (AATTAP), to **review** updates and information about the **Ashlynne Mike** AMBER Alert in Indian Country Act. It also learned more about AATTAP's Child Abduction Tabletop Exercise (**CATE**), a tool that helps communities strengthen emergency response capabilities. MMDR Task Force Chair Amber Kanazbah Crotty called the presentation "a commitment to action, to justice, and to protecting our children and families." The **task force** is collaborating with AIIC to schedule a series of training sessions to help Tribal law enforcement officials, educators, and community members be better prepared in cases of missing Indigenous children. It plans to integrate AIIC training programs into its regular meetings.

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