

# THE AMBER ADVOCATE

## THE ROAD AHEAD

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ALERT

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For print edition stories, hyperlinks to additional information are represented by words and phrases in bold. Please visit our website at **AMBERAdvocate.org** to download the full PDF, or read individual stories on the website to interact with hyperlinks.





## ‘By You, for You’

With your input, a compelling mix of relevant and valuable learning experiences are in gear this year

### Change is inevitable. It’s how we respond to it that counts.

Consider technological advances. They’re an immeasurable help to law enforcement agencies searching for missing children—allowing them to issue AMBER Alerts faster, to geo-targeted areas, and track the digital footprints (banking transactions, app logins, license plate readers) of the people they seek.

But just when the good guys can at least follow the tech learning curve (if not get ahead of it), criminal minds are devising new ways to circumvent detection—trafficking vulnerable, endangered youth not just in recesses of the dark web, but increasingly in plain sight, with coded everyday language meant to mask its true intent.

Such are the concerns that keep our AATTAP curricula and training teams up at night. The ongoing threat makes us work harder than ever to update and develop courses taught by leading subject matter experts and provide best-in-class training materials for law enforcement and child protection professionals.

With grant support from the U.S. Department of Justice and Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, the AATTAP



“Any chance we get to connect with our partners—to really listen to them—allows us to respond successfully to their needs.”

Janell Rasmussen

is working to share “the very best thinking and practices with law enforcement agencies and child protection partners before problems arise,” says AATTAP Administrator Janell Rasmussen.

She regularly traverses the nation to attend national conferences, Child Abduction Response Team (CART) certifications, onsite training, and Tribal AMBER Alert implementation meetings.

Anticipating how best to prevent, interdict, and prosecute those who would harm children requires paying close attention to emerging crime schemes and observing how criminal justice professionals are successfully solving them.

“It also takes understanding what training and technical assistance law enforcement agencies *actually* need, not just what *we* think they need,” says AATTAP Program Manager Byron Fassett.

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## Curriculum Development: What's new?

Updated courses—informed by “grassroots” input from law enforcement agencies and pertinent crime data—taught by the AATTAP’s expanding cadre of subject matter experts.

New courses focused on children missing from care; missing children of color; chronic runaways; public information officer best practices; unresolved child abduction investigations; and officers impacted by mental health issues and secondary trauma.

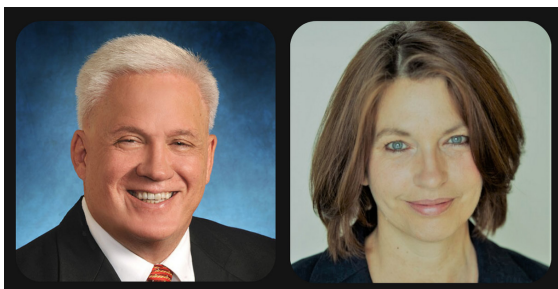
*Left: One of two field assessment sessions recently held in the Washington, D.C., area.*

The theme for the curriculum development —“by you, for you”—has involved recruiting the nation’s top experts to help develop and deliver new cutting-edge courses and update existing offerings; following emerging technologies and trends; letting reliable data and verifiable trends inform project planning; and creating more flexibility for busy professionals by offering online training that includes self-paced courses, live and recorded webinars, live instructor-led courses, and live hybrid events that combine onsite and online participation. The goal is to ensure 2023 courses are “relevant and valuable,” says Project Coordinator Cathy Delapaz.

### Building ‘responsive’ curriculum

Cathy and Byron spearheaded two successful field-assessment events this fall in the

Washington, D.C., area. Both needs-assessment sessions involved a total of 62 participants “in the trenches” of finding endangered missing children, through investigative work and/or with CARTs. “We wanted to hear from people in the field who deal with life-and-death situations every day,” Byron says.



Byron Fassett, left, and Cathy Delapaz

“We wanted their honest feedback on our curriculum to assess its effectiveness, efficacy and relevance, so we can make it responsive to their needs.”

The new or revamped courses Cathy and Byron are overseeing “will demonstrate in tangible ways how our trainings are field-informed. We’re proud of that,” Byron says.



## CART training & international outreach: What's new?

Increased follow-up with law enforcement agencies interested in forming CARTs.

Post-training mentoring “to help agencies strengthen what they’ve learned,” Derek says.

Providing agencies with data on “just how effective CARTs are in helping to win leadership buy-in,” Jesi says.

Planning a Northern Border Initiative focus group similar to one conducted in Puerto Rico to inform current and future curricula. (For a related story, see Page 16.)

*Left: CART certification training in Gloucester County, New Jersey.*

### Priming the ‘front-loaded response’

Central to AATTAP’s mission is helping law enforcement agencies and their regional partners respond to missing child incidents via fast, efficient, multi-disciplinary CART deployments.

Project Coordinators Derek VanLuchene and Yesenia “Jesi” Leon-Baron work with an experienced team of trainers to assess CART programs across the country and support their development, training, and certification /re-certification efforts. Jesi also oversees international collaborations, including both the Southern and Northern Border Initiatives (SBI, NBI) that involve partners with Mexico and Canada, respectively.

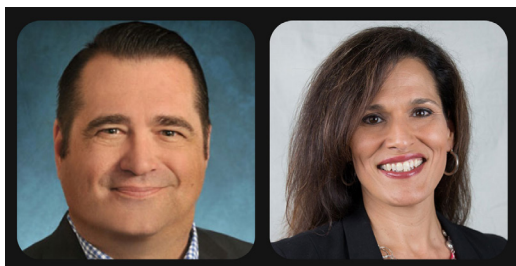
Having played key roles in supporting the

recent field-assessment trainings, Derek and Jesi are focusing not on hypotheticals, but “real-world challenges CARTs face—staffing turnover, the need for regular training, support from leadership, and help obtaining specialized resources,” Derek says.

“We help teams understand they must have resources in place for a front-loaded response—so when they get a call, they’re not scrambling for people or resources,” Jesi adds.

### ‘Organic outreach’ in Indian Country

The AMBER in Indian Country team, comprised of Program Manager Tyeshia Wood and Project Coordinator Valerie Bribiescas, focuses on helping the nation’s 574 federally recognized Tribes assess their capacity to effectively respond when Native children go missing—



Derek VanLuchene, left, and Yesenia Leon-Baron

“Participating in a field-assessment session was a great opportunity to dig down and find solutions to CART issues. I left with a real sense of accomplishment.”

Sergeant Derek Mahlum  
Great Falls, Montana, Police Department

Continued on next page





and provides educational outreach to prevent such incidents.

In 2022 the team began a long-term initiative to provide AMBER Alert in Indian Country **Technology Toolkits** at no cost to requesting Tribes. This year they are continuing that work, and plan to connect with Tribes farther afield, such as Alaska and Maine. Such work requires deft cultural sensitivity. Both Tyesha and Valerie—Navajo Nation members and experienced Tribal detectives—recognize the myriad of complexities involved.

“Sovereignty is huge in Indian Country, so we need to know and respect each Tribe’s laws, customs, traditions, greetings, and stories,” Tyesha says. “And being invited by each Tribe to discuss ways we can help



Tyesha Wood, left, and Valerie Bribiescas

### Indian Country outreach: What’s new?

Continued delivery of Technology Toolkits, with the goal of deploying 265 of them.

More outreach meetings with Tribal/state officials to explain resources available under the **Ashlynnne Mike AMBER Alert in Indian Country Act**.

Developing/implementing new onsite and online training offerings, such as the Missing Child Investigations in Indian Country (**MCI-IC**) series, which specifically addresses the needs in Indian Country and support Tribal-state collaboration.

Providing funding opportunities to help Tribes meet technology resource goals.

Working with AATTAP’s CART team to encourage Tribal CART training, and continuing to provide Child Abduction Tabletop Exercises.

More networking with smaller, more remote Tribes to expand connections.

*Left: The Navajo Nation receives Technology Toolkits.*

them is essential,” Valerie adds. “We never want to overstep our boundaries with Tribal elders or leadership.”

Relationship-building is especially crucial to emphasize amid changing federal and state laws, such as the controversial **McGirt v. Oklahoma** ruling in 2020, wherein the U.S. Supreme Court ruled Oklahoma no longer had the right to try criminal cases involving Tribal lands or members.

Navigating jurisdictional battles between states and Tribes can feel like one step forward and two steps back. “We get that,” Tyesha says. “But we want Tribes to know we’re here for them. We’re here to help them build on strengths and overcome obstacles.”

### ‘Inform, educate, and inspire’

Phrases such as “the digital experience,” “asynchronous,” and “accessibility optimization” are often used in the multi-



faceted work overseen by Bonnie Ferenbach, Program Manager for AATTAP's eLearning, Websites, and Publications.

Bonnie's work across all three of these areas focuses on the integrity of content, design quality, functionality, the user experience, and accessibility. She also is a seasoned presenter and instructor with experience in developing and guiding law enforcement telecommunications operational response to missing and abducted child incidents.

It was that work which brought her to AATTAP as a consultant in 2006. She helped develop the "Telecommunications Best Practices for Missing and Abducted Children" course, which has been delivered both online and in the classroom for more than 15 years.

When not focused on eLearning initiatives, Bonnie collaborates with Project Coordinator Denise Gee Peacock to develop engaging

## Publications, websites & eLearning: What's new?

A multimedia update of the U.S. Department of Justice's *When Your Child is Missing: A Family Survival Guide*.

A series of self-paced eLearning courses that will provide scenario-based knowledge checks and resource downloads, each course building on the next.

A new publication on additional alerting strategies/tools to help notify the public when a case does not meet AMBER Alert criteria for issuance. "This will be in keeping with our longstanding collaboration with the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children," Bonnie says.

*Left: Parent-survivors of missing child-cases take a break during a recent video-filming project for future training objectives.*

and educational content for *The AMBER Advocate* and various online platforms. Content is delivered across both *The AMBER Advocate* ([amberadvocate.org](http://amberadvocate.org)) and the *AMBER Alert in Indian Country* ([amber-ic.org](http://amber-ic.org)) websites, along with a vast array of resources and training information.

"We want the AMBERAdvocate.org site to be as informative as it is interactive," Bonnie explains, noting the community of practice dimension of the website's **Partner Portal**. The secure platform allows AMBER Alert Coordinators, Missing Persons Clearinghouse Managers, and others to find contact information for colleagues in similar positions across the nation, engage in discussion forums around an array of topics important to their work, and both utilize and contribute to an extensive resource library.



Bonnie Ferenbach, left, and Denise Gee Peacock

Continued on next page



From left: Jennifer Price-Lehmann, Jill Nysse, and Mishelle Bowen

### **‘What we do really makes a difference’**

With its complex operations, none of the AATTAP and AIIIC gears would turn without the exceptional team that coordinates the logistics and monitors the feasibility and effectiveness of the team’s many projects.

At the group’s helm is Program Manager Jennifer Price-Lehmann, who monitors budgeting and financials. She works closely with Janell in overseeing the budget and grant management, as well as major events, to ensure the work we do is consistent with our mission as well as that of our federal grantors. She’s also recognized as a stellar problem solver, metrics monitor, mentor, and cross-function/team collaboration strategist. Jennifer works closely with a dynamic duo she calls “the unsung heroes of the program” —Project Coordinator Jill Nysse and Mishelle Bowen, Administrative Assistant.

“Both are dedicated to ensuring training operates smoothly and participants and

instructors have all the tools they need,” Jennifer says.

On any given day they are securing adequate space for onsite training events, coordinating the shipment of materials, booking lodging, helping instructors build and adjust travel itineraries; finalizing program records and documentation; and helping participants access online training and resources.

Jill is motivated by the powerful stories shared by AATTAP “family members”— parents and siblings of missing children.

Understanding their struggles puts any trivial matters into perspective “when I realize I’m helping children and making the world a better place.”

The same goes for Mishelle. She mentions an online encounter with a police officer trying to access a virtual, live course. After she provided the help he needed, his follow-up note was more than a simple “thank you.”

“A few weeks after taking the course he let me know his team was put to the test by a case involving a missing child,” Mishelle says. “But because of what they had learned during the training session, he and his colleagues were able to safely locate the child.”

That still resonates with her. “It reminds me that what we do really makes a difference.”

— Denise Gee Peacock



#### **Get Smart**

Check out our growing list of self-paced eLearning, webinars, and live instructor-led training events at [bit.ly/AATTAPcourses](https://bit.ly/AATTAPcourses)



# ON THE FRONT LINES



*The abducted teen is shown reuniting with his mother after his ordeal.*  
Photo: KWTX

## Danger at Play

The virtual reality world of social gaming got very real for a Utah teen abducted from home by a fellow gamer – an accused sexual predator from Arizona. The boy was found safe, nearly 800 miles from home, thanks to a good Samaritan.

**Little did the parents** of a Layton, Utah, 13-year-old know how dangerous his immersion into the social gaming platform **Roblox** had become.

Noticing their son was becoming more secretive, distracted, and easily agitated, the couple investigated the game's communications log for clues to his behavioral changes. They were distraught to find that he was conversing with a gamer named "Hunter Fox" who identified as a "furry" (someone who enjoys dressing up as a furry animal).

As they combed through the text-like interactions, they saw the conversation had increasingly become sexualized in tone. But because such language might be

flagged, and hinder the gamers' access to Roblox, "Hunter" discussed using other digital platforms to continue communication.

Alarmed, the parents contacted the Layton Police Department (LPD) on November 29, 2022, to report their findings. Over the next several weeks, the LPD awaited information stemming from subpoenas issued to help them identify the online predator.

Meanwhile "Hunter" began using other methods to communicate with the boy, primarily via text messages in which he shared nude photos and videos of himself. He pressured the boy to do likewise. Soon, "Hunter" convinced the boy to meet him late in the evening on December 26, 2022.

Continued on next page

**“The parents did everything they could in this instance. This was just a persistent suspect and perpetrator. We’re just glad it ended the way it did.”**

Lieutenant Travis Lyman  
Layton, Utah, Police Department



The suspected abductor, whose real name was Aaron Zeman (though he had numerous aliases), was thought to be traveling with the boy in a 1998 Toyota Avalon. The vehicle had damage to the front grill and a temporary Arizona tag. And based on the LPD’s detective work, they believed Zeman to be taking the boy to either Arizona or Texas, where Zeman had ties.

As LPD Lieutenant Travis Layton and his team were pursuing the boy’s digital footprints and trying to track the vehicle, good news arrived within 24 hours—from nearly 800 miles away in Nebraska.

**Just after 1 a.m.** December 28, the clerk working at the Git ‘N Split near I-80 in Grand Island, Nebraska, noticed some suspicious activity. A white Toyota Avalon, driven by an adult male accompanied by a teenage boy, had pulled up to a gas pump and parked. After no one exited the car to purchase gas, the vehicle drove away from the pump, headed the wrong way down an access road, turned around, and then parked in a dimly lit area near the store.

That prompted the clerk to alert the Grand Island Police Department (GIPD), who quickly arrived at the scene.

After running the vehicle’s plate number, officers discovered it was wanted in

connection with the AMBER Alert issued in Utah the day before.

ABC-affiliate Nebraska TV **reported** that the person driving the vehicle initially identified himself as “Tadashi Kojima” before officers realized he was Aaron Zeman, 26, wanted in connection with the AMBER Alert. By 2 a.m., the boy was taken to a place of safety while Zeman was booked into the Hall County jail on suspicion of kidnapping.

“We are grateful that [the store attendant] was paying attention, and was able to report the unusual activity,” LPD Lieutenant Travis Lyman **told** Fox13 News. Lyman said it was unclear where Zeman actually planned to take the boy, but what was most alarming was learning he had requested the boy bring his passport with him, which he did.

While the teen agreed to meet the man, Lyman said, “he is 13 years old and cannot consent in any way. Therefore Aaron [Zeman] had [committed] kidnapping.”

At last check, Zeman was being held in a Nebraska jail, booked on \$1 million bail. He is facing one felony count of kidnapping and resisting arrest. Lyman noted that Zeman will likely face the felony charge of online enticement of a minor. And since Zeman took the teen across state lines, his crime could be prosecuted federally.

"After helping the boy rejoin his family, we'll work with our federal partners and law enforcement in Nebraska to determine charges and who may be handling what parts of this investigation," Lyman said.

**Speaking on behalf of the boy's family** in Utah, friend Beth Cooper described the 13-year-old as a "handsome, brilliant young man."

"He comes from a very loving household, a safe environment. He's grown up with two loving parents his entire life," she **told** Fox13 Salt Lake City. "This just isn't one of those scenarios in which he was trying to run away from a bad home. He was manipulated by someone pretending to be someone they were not. ... He doesn't

understand yet why when somebody asks you to leave your house, you don't go."

**Thankfully, the AMBER Alert system worked.** "I've learned a lot about that," Cooper explained. "It's amazing to see how putting out the [AMBER Alert] quickly puts everyone on alert—not only officers in this state, but those in surrounding ones" who can access the information.

Happily, the boy's mom and dad "are beyond ecstatic that this was the outcome," she said.

When the mother reunited with her son, she told reporters that the anguish of not knowing where her son was for two days is something she "wouldn't wish on my worst enemy. It's every parent's worst nightmare."

— Denise Gee Peacock



If the Nebraska gas station attendant had not been observant, or vigilant enough to contact local authorities about the suspicious man (Aaron Zeman, left), "we may never have had the chance to reunite with our son," said the teen's mother. Photos: KSL-TV



# FACES OF THE AMBER ALERT

## Communication Central: AATTAP Region One Liaison Joan Collins

**Joan Collins is uniquely qualified** to be the Region One Liaison for the AMBER Alert Training and Technical Assistance Program (AATTAP). For the 11 states that call on her for guidance—spanning Maine to West Virginia—she provides AMBER Alert Coordinators, Missing Persons Clearinghouse Managers, and members of law enforcement with an experienced insider's perspective that few can match.

“Joanie,” as many know her, joined the AATTAP a year and a half ago after retiring from the Rhode Island State Police (RISP) after 28 years’ service—25 spent as the RISP’s Law Enforcement Telecommunications Unit Communications Specialist Supervisor. During her RISP career she also helped audit and train all users of the Rhode Island Law Enforcement Telecommunications System (RILETS); was central to increasing the state’s various emergency alerts; managed the state’s sex offender/“Most Wanted” databases; and worked with the state’s Internet Crimes Against Children task force.

### **What inspired you to work with AATTAP?**

All of my experience over the years strengthened my determination to work diligently on missing and exploited children cases. My passion and motivation for this work was energized from hearing and seeing the trauma, raw emotions, and tragedy experienced by families. Their heartache inspired me to work on cases involving missing and exploited children. When the opportunity arose to work in my current role, I knew it would allow me to continue being a part of this important work. I was humbled when asked to consider the position because I had met and worked with many of the



Joan Collins is all smiles upon retiring after 28 years’ service with the Rhode Island State Police. She joined AATTAP shortly afterward.  
Photo: Facebook

brilliant people involved in the program over the years. Each training I received from AATTAP, and others gave me the chance to review our agency’s procedures to make positive changes. Working with AATTAP would allow our collective experiences, strengths, and skills to enhance the training we provide.

### **What has prepared you for the position?**

A law enforcement career where I had to respond quickly—sometimes with little information to go on—and one in which I had to know what resources were available. Early in my career, a clerk took a call related to a family issue that was characterized as a civil matter. It was entered into our system as a “low priority” case, and only provided “child taken” in the comments field. When I asked for more information, I learned that was all we had.

Luckily we had a telephone number, so I called the person who reported the situation. I then learned her child had been taken by her estranged husband or boyfriend, and that someone had possibly been hit by the man's vehicle during the ordeal. I quickly requested assistance for someone to render aid to the person injured, and one of our units was able to stop the abductor's vehicle just before it crossed state lines. The child was thankfully recovered, but I'll never forget the stressors—nor the absolute joy when the case was resolved.

### What does your AATTAP work involve?

I connect the northeastern states with AATTAP training and resources. And through communication and problem-solving, I help them review their AMBER Alert issuance criteria, update and strengthen their policies and procedures, and improve response times when issuing an AMBER or Endangered Missing Alert. I suggest training opportunities for law enforcement agencies and those focused on children and families and help states review training materials. I also update AMBER Alert coordinators, missing persons clearinghouse managers, and Child Abduction Response Team (CART) program leaders in Region



**“During a missing child investigation, everyone has a crucial role to play to help solve the case.”**

Joan Collins

One on upcoming events and changes on the horizon of AATTAP-NCJTC and AMBER Alert in general. My goal is ensuring everyone involved in the process of finding missing and endangered children can perform effectively.

### How would you describe the importance of training?

Providing people with training not only teaches them skills to work effectively, but it also shows them they are valued. This improves their morale and workplace capabilities, which enhance efficiency.

### What are your goals for 2023?

To encourage ongoing training initiatives while strengthening Region One's networking. While

with the RISP, I recognized our expansive network was mutually beneficial; we could learn from each other. We should reach out to one another, just to listen or share experiences.

### What do you most look forward to accomplishing?

Informing our partners about essential training and resources, while also obtaining valuable input from those dedicated to ensuring the well-being of children. Keeping children safe represents my perfect day.

— Jon Leiberman

# AMBER ALERT UNITED STATES

## Florida officials providing 250,000 free child-ID kits

If the worst-case scenario ever happens, Florida officials want parents to be ready. On the heels of more than 25,000 incidents of missing children reported to authorities in 2022, the state will be giving free identification kits to parents. The **goal** is to make it easier for parents to collect identifying information on cards that can be kept at home if they are ever needed. About 250,000 kits will be provided to all public, private, and charter schools for the parents of kindergarten students.



## Colorado operation recovers 11 high-risk missing kids

“Operation Lost and Found” has located nearly a dozen endangered missing children throughout the Denver metro area. A two-week **operation** by the Aurora Police Department, the U.S. Marshals, and the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children helped find the children, who ranged in age for 12 to 17. Authorities said the children were “some of the most at-risk and challenging recovery cases in the area, based on factors such as child sex trafficking, child exploitation, sex abuse, physical abuse and medical or mental health conditions.”



## Navajo Nation unveils new missing persons guidelines

Navajo Nation President Jonathan Nez and First Lady Phefelina Nez have issued an executive order laying out new **guidelines** for missing persons cases that will emphasize being more empathetic to victims and their families. “Many families know the personal heartbreak and trauma of missing loved ones in the Navajo Nation and throughout Indian Country. Multiple jurisdiction systems have historically failed the victims and their families,” said President Nez. The new guidelines will mandate that any missing persons case should immediately involve the victim’s family, relatives, and community.



## ‘Baby Melissa’ reunites with family after missing 51 years

On August 23, 1971, 1-year-old Melissa Highsmith of Fort Worth was kidnapped by a woman posing as a babysitter. Her family searched for in vain for her over five decades, and never gave up. Encouraged by the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children, the family used the genetic-testing company 23andMe—and Jeffrie Highsmith **discovered** a grandchild he didn’t know he had. Highsmith then found a Facebook account likely connected to his long-lost daughter, who went by “Melanie Walden.” And of all places, she lived in Fort Worth, where her family still resided. When Highsmith contacted Melanie/Melissa, he shared his (and her) story, but Walden, 53, thought he was trying to scam her. Additional genetic testing confirmed that she was indeed “Baby Melissa.” During the family’s reunion, they learned of Walden’s abusive childhood. “I finally have a mother and father who want me,” Walden said. She has since changed her name back to Melissa Highsmith.





# AMBER ALERT INTERNATIONAL

## Five mothers seeking 'disappeared' family members found murdered in Mexico

In the past two years, five volunteer activists in Mexico who have frantically searched for their missing “disappeared” (and presumed murdered) children have **themselves** been murdered. The news has gotten little attention. With more than 100,000 missing people in Mexico, experts say police often lack the time, expertise, or interest to look for the clandestine grave sites where narco-gangs frequently bury the victims. And so, volunteers—many of them relatives of the missing—do the searching themselves. Unfortunately, Maria Vázquez Ramírez, is the latest victim. She was killed while searching for her son, Osmar. In response, the Movement for our Disappeared in Mexico group, which supports the volunteer searchers, decried the act as “cowardly”—releasing a photo of Maria with her missing son with the words, “I didn’t live long enough to find you.” The group demands Mexico do more to search for all the missing, saying, “Violence against searchers shouldn’t be the norm.”



## Research: Every day about 17 migrant children in Europe go missing for criminals' intent

On November 20, 2022—World Children’s Day—Sakarya University’s Diaspora Research Center in Turkey **reported** that the number of cases involving missing migrant children in Europe is skyrocketing. According to their 2021 “Lost in Europe” report, more than 18,000 migrant children went missing in Europe between 2018 and 2020—an average of 17 refugee children each day. European authorities are banding together to try and stem this tide. The sad reality behind the high numbers of missing is that criminal organizations target refugee children in Europe and ensnare them in sex trafficking and forced begging.



## Missing Children Europe reflects on 20 years' success 'but more work is needed'

The group Missing Children Europe was founded in 2001 to protect children from becoming missing. The group coordinates a vast network of missing children hotlines and cross-border family mediators throughout Europe. The group recently celebrated its 20th anniversary at a celebrity-studded event. But the event’s main goal was to highlight the **fact** that since the launch of its hotlines in 2007, operators across Europe have answered more than two million calls and supported more than 70,000 cases involving missing children. Those numbers were tempered by this equally stark reality: “The war on Ukraine and the expansion of the internet with both its opportunities and risks of harm for children are just two of the more recent challenges that need tackling,” Missing Children Europe said. The organization plans to continue better protecting and empowering at-risk children through research, advocacy, training, and education.



# IN THE SPOTLIGHT

## AATTAP's Byron Fassett awarded for remarkable leadership

AMBER Alert Training and Technical Assistance Program (AATTAP) Manager Byron Fassett recently received the prestigious Champion of Freedom Award from the North Texas Coalition Against Human Trafficking.

Fassett was honored for his “remarkable leadership in investigations of victimization, exploitation, and trafficking of women and children,” said Dallas’s Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) organization.

During his decades with the Dallas Police Department (DPD) and the Dallas Child Advocacy Center (DCAC)—and through his longstanding, continued work with AATTAP and the National Criminal Justice Training Center – Fassett has developed, taught, and stewarded methods, resources, and initiatives to improve law enforcement’s work to combat human trafficking and the exploitation of youth.

“This recognition is only possible because of the great team I worked with at DPD, DCAC, and the opportunity to continue this work with the AATTAP and NCJTC,” said Fassett, a Texas native.



Byron Fassett, right, receives the North Texas Coalition Against Human Trafficking Champion of Freedom Award from Chad Frymire, Dallas CASA Program Manager. Photo: CASA

“Byron is the real deal,” said AATTAP Project Coordinator Cathy Delapaz, who works with Fassett to develop training. Delapaz also worked with him at the DPD to create ground-breaking and life-saving human and sex trafficking initiatives. “He is personally responsible for developing and maintaining a model [known nationally as the ‘Dallas High-Risk Victims Model’] that has led to the recovery of thousands of child sex trafficking victims who never would have been recovered if not for him.”



## CART training in Puerto Rico wins high praise

AATTAP team members visited Puerto Rico in January to conduct “Rescue, Recovery, and Reunification” field-training exercises for Child Abduction Response Teams (CART) and other members of law enforcement. “The CART training was a success, and for the first time ever we had a member of Congress at our training,” said AATTAP Administrator Janell Rasmussen.

Congresswoman Jenniffer González Colón told the large crowd in attendance, “I’d like to thank the National Criminal Justice Training Center of Fox Valley Technical College and the AMBER Alert Training and Technical Assistance Program for their help. They visited last November and were eager to offer training in Puerto Rico, where law enforcement officers are always ready when it comes to helping our kids.”

See related photos and video:  
[bit.ly/PRaattap](https://bit.ly/PRaattap)

