

# Homicide Symposium

## Conducting an Effective Search and Canvas of the Crime Scene

St. Petersburg, FL  
July 2009





# Presentation To Cover

- Surviving Family Roundtable / Comments
- Kassie Trimmier Case Study
- Washington State Child Homicide Study
- Use of Volunteers and Resources
- And.....



WHO

HOW

WHY

WHEN

WHERE

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# Comprehensive Child Recovery Strategy

**Program  
Strategy**

**Policy  
Development**

Stakeholders  
Identified

Command Post  
Operations

Technology  
Support

Training &  
Development

Preliminary  
Investigation  
Protocol

Search & Recovery  
Protocol

Phone Bank  
Activation &  
Staffing

Quality  
Control

Practical  
Exercise

Call Intake

Specific Agencies  
Response

Media  
Plan

Debriefing  
Evaluation

Liability  
Awareness

Abduction  
Verification  
Protocol

AMBER Alert  
Activation

Resource  
& Info  
Sharing

Strategy  
Oversight &  
Policymaking

Annual  
Review  
of Plan

Resource  
Inventory

Interagency  
Notification

Criteria for  
Abducted/Missing  
Children



# Surviving Families Roundtable

- First responders often suggest waiting period for child to return home.
- Changes in law enforcement personnel confuse family.
- Agencies fail to coordinate efforts, withholding information from each other.
- Some agencies were viewed by the parents as less than truthful.



## Surviving Families Roundtable (cont.)

- Want to undergo polygraph ASAP!
- Want process explained to them ASAP!
- First responders clearly not prepared to respond
- Investigation appears to suffer delays while additional resources are gathered



## Surviving Families Roundtable (cont.)

- Missing children were a low priority to law enforcement.
- Responders failed to search adequately, searches not organized.
- Law enforcement and prosecutors did not coordinate efforts.
- Complexity of situations confusing to parents.



# Case Study of Kassandra Ann Trimmier

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# "Kassie" Trimmier



- DOB 2/20/89
- Date of Death – 7/29/92
- Date of Recovery/Discovery – 4/27/95



# John Clark Kearney

- DOB 9/16/77
- Age at time of offense-14 years, 10 months (7/29/92)
- Age at time of arrest-17 years, 7 months (4/27/95)





# Case Overview

- 7/29/92 – Kearney kills Kassie, puts her in two trash bags and places her in crawl space above his apartment.
- \* Kearney and Kassie lived in same building 3 doors apart







# Timelines

- 5:00 pm on 7/29/92 – Kassie was last seen alive
- 5:00 – 5:30 pm – Kearney killed Kassie
- 5:30 – 7:24 pm – Family/neighbors search for Kassie
- 7:24 pm – Police are called



# Timelines (cont.)

- 7:30 – 9:30 pm – Uniformed officers search for Kassie
- 7:30 – 8:30 pm – Kearney accompanies officer in cruiser to “help” locate Kassie
- 9:30 pm – Investigators called to scene
- 10:30 pm – Volunteer Rescue Squad begins search







- Focus of search was on wooded area
- Door to door canvas was not done initially nor as a follow up next day or next week!
- Focus was on mother and drug debt conspiracy/kidnapping
- Arrest was made but subject released after 69 days in jail



# April 27, 1995

- 11:03 am – Construction workers at Kearney's now empty apartment discover body in crawl space
- Previous tenant is located, Kearney is taken into custody from neighboring city
- Kearney confesses to killing Kassie

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- KEARNEY IS GIVEN 25 YEARS IN JAIL
- TO BE RELEASED 2018
- HE WILL BE 41 YEARS OLD!!!!



- Case studies as well as training courses often raise many questions regarding:
  - Capacity / Capabilities
  - Policy vs. Practice
  - Fact vs. Fiction



# What is biggest enemy of law enforcement?

Arrogance

Focus first on what we know vs. what we think,  
feel, or believe



# Washington State Child Homicide Study

1997 & 2006

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# 1997 Cases

- Data from 44 states
- 577 cases w/621 victims w/419 killers w/562 victims under 18 years of age



# Key Findings

- 58% of cases were initially a “missing child” w/no indication of foul play
- 60% of all cases had a two hour reporting delay
- 74% of children abducted and murdered are killed within 3 hours





## Key Findings (cont.)

- 53% of murdered victims are killed by a stranger
- 80% of all cases had the victim being abducted within  $\frac{1}{4}$  mile of victims last know location
- Initial contact site to murder site increases to greater then  $\frac{1}{4}$  of a mile (54%)
- Murder site to body dump site decreases to less than 200 ft (72%)



# Investigative Implications

- If initial contact site is not identified, clearance rate drops to 30% vs. 70% if initial contact site is identified
- Neighborhood canvas / role of 911 can help identify last known location / initial contact site
- ½ of abductions occurred within 3 blocks of child's home / 1/3 of abductions within ½ block!



# Victim Profile

- "Average child", normal life, normal families, typical low risk victims
- 76% female
- 11.4 years of age
- 74% white



# Killer Profile

- 27 years old, 68% white
- Predominately unmarried (85%)
- ½ unemployed / "Social Marginal's"
- 2/3 of killers had prior arrest for violent crimes
- ½ of these had crimes against children
- 66% at scene for legitimate reason
- 29% lived in area



# #1 Occupation of Killers

- 28% - Construction Workers
- \* Do not ignore work sites on canvass



# Lifestyle of Killers

- 40% described as "strange"
- 32% - Alcohol abuser
- 27% - Drug user/abuser
- 79% of killers moved at least once in last 5 years
  - 43% moved at least 3 times in 5 years
  - 21% moving at least 5 times in last 5 years



# Cause of Death

- Strangulation – 33%
- Stabbing / cutting – 24%
- Blunt force trauma – 21%
- Firearm – 11%



# Post Offense Behavior

- Returned to body disposal site – 22%  
(81% of these killers returned to crime scene prior to discovery of body!!  
56% do so within 3 days of the murder!)
- Left town – 21%
- Confided in someone – 18%
- Followed case in media – 17%
- Contacted victim's family – 11%
- Interjected himself into investigation – 10%





# Unknowing Witness/Neighborhood Canvass

- 40% of cases had unknowing witness
- 63% of cases, canvas was done within 2.5 hours
- 72% of cases, canvas was done within 12 hours
- 10% + no canvas was done

What is your capacity to do this????



# Body Recovery Site/Body Disposal Site

- 52% of time body is concealed
- What is impact on search for child?



# Washington State Child Homicide Study 2006

175 cases – supportive of the 1997 report with several significant and definite differences between 1997 report and the 2006 report

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# Differences

- 1997 – pornography trigger in 4% of cases
- 2006 – pornography trigger in 20% of cases
  
- 1997 – 10% did not do a canvas
- 2006 – 21% did not do a canvas
  
- 1997 – 53% of children killed by stranger
- 2006 – 44% killed by stranger



## Differences (cont.)

- 1997 – 39% killed by friend/acquaintance
- 2006 – 41% killed by friend/acquaintance



- In over 50% of cases, at the body dump site, within 1 mile, evidence relating to the murder was located
- Impact on perimeter?
- Canvass?



# Volunteers

- Do you use them?
- Why? Why not?
- You must be prepared for them either way!!
- They are coming



## Volunteers (cont.)

- Photograph/videotape all volunteers
- Use of volunteer ID's
- Name, DOB, address, etc.
- Master log of volunteers
- Inventory of expertise/skills

\*Abductors may inject themselves into the search or try to volunteer in some way





# Span of Control

- Trained searchers to control search, volunteers, public safety personnel, others
- No one searches alone
- Searchers not to discuss activities with family or friends
- Searchers not to talk to media



# Other Search Issues

- Issue name badges to searchers
  - Number/color by search area
  - Entry/exit of search area
- Every team has a leader
- Instruct/coach searches and activities
- A potential object or find is not to be touched
- Equipment issues
- Briefings
- Signs of stress



# Searching for a Child: A Proactive Guide

- Types of Searches
  - Type I – Hasty
  - Type II – Efficient
  - Type III - Thorough



# Type I – Hasty Search

- Performed by initial responder
- Fast, speed with limited thoroughness or efficiency
- Used to check leads
- 3 to 6 searchers required



# Type II – Efficient Search

- Slower, more disciplined
- Could include door to door, a fast search
- Used early in investigation, high probability areas
- 3 to 7 searchers



# Type III – Thorough Search

- Slow, deliberate
- Disciplined
- Door to door, outbuildings, crawl space, etc.

Note: Searches may be enhanced with K-9, tracking dogs, helicopters, night vision and other technologies



# Establishing Search Command Post

- Managed as part of Incident Command process
- Search operations commander
- Coordination and documentation of areas to be searched
- Allow/mandate overlapping areas
- Determine availability of technologies



# Establishing Search Command Post (cont.)

- Weather (immediate forecast)
- Terrain
  - Crossing of rivers/streams
  - Desert
  - Snow
  - Mountain
  - Wildlife
  - Other





# Evidence Processing

- Who / How / Reporting
- Timeliness of reporting
- Emergency protocol for fast searches
- Reporting schedules
- Identification of hazards



# Roadblock

- Definition: The restriction, obstruction, device or procedure used or intended for the purpose of preventing free passage and/or observation of motor vehicles on a roadway in order to effect the apprehension of a suspect, stop a crime or obtain witness information



# Investigative Roadblocks

- High risk situation
- Inherently dangerous
  - Implement in a manner that affords minimal risk to police, bystanders, hostages and suspects
  - Establish liaison with other law enforcement agencies in the area to ensure proper coordination of procedures



# Court OKs Roadblocks to Hunt Criminals

- The Supreme Court Justices ruled, in a case watched anxiously by law enforcement agencies across America, on January 13, 2004 that police may set up roadblocks to collect tips about unsolved crimes
- In a 6-3 decision, the justices found roadblocks seeking such information do not violate the privacy rights of motorists



# Court OKs Roadblocks to Hunt Criminals (cont.)

- Justice Stephen Breyer, writing the majority opinion, said that short stops, "a very few minutes at most," are not too intrusive on motorists. Police may hand out a flyer, or ask drivers to volunteer information about crimes, he said.



# Investigative Tool

- Information dissemination and intelligence gathering technique
  - Posters
- Select the appropriate time:
  - Immediately after the report of an abduction
    - ◆ Opportunity to rescue missing and/or abducted child and confine suspect
    - ◆ Ideal for locating an unknowing witness that might have time critical information



## Investigative Tool (cont.)

- Establish roadblocks to further develop the identities of individuals who routinely travel through the area of the incident (commuters, newspaper carriers, delivery people, utilities)
  - Remember looking for unknowing witnesses
- Establish what is happening in the area
  - Was there a normal flow of traffic?
  - Diverted for some type of event, incident?



# Investigative Tool (cont.)

- The following day at the same time the child went missing in an effort to identify unknowing witnesses
- A week later on the same day of the week and same time in an effort to discover other witnesses that might traverse the same locations, same day of the week and same time period





# Search / Canvass Mechanics

- Labor intensive
- Mix of uniformed / plain clothes
- Coordinated / organized
- Documentation / some scripted questions
- Multiple locations of canvass i.e., scene, body recovery, vehicle recovery, etc.



# Search / Canvass Mechanics (cont.)

- Rumors / gossip / innuendo has a place
- Always leave contact numbers for individuals
- Anonymity is a concern
- Investigator should try and get invited in?
  - Sit down?
  - Enhance cooperation, show respect
  - Take refreshments?
- Slow paced and deliberate



# Search / Canvass Mechanics (cont.)

- Canvass as soon as possible after a crime
- Redone next day at same time
- Redone a week or so after crime
- Be wary of early am contacts
- Canvass personnel should have case information
- Do not overlook work, business, construction sites



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# Practice / Train / Practice

Train with other agencies





# Documentation

- Sex Offender Canvass
- Roadblock Canvass
- Neighborhood Investigation Checklist
- Neighborhood Canvass
- Business Canvass

\* All on disc\*



# Crime Scene Mistakes

- Failing to remove family members and/or others from the location
- Failing to isolate and secure the crime scene and prevent unauthorized entry
- Failing to prevent other police officers from unnecessarily going into the crime scene
- Failure to prevent supervisors and others from unnecessarily going into the crime scene



## Crime Scene Mistakes (cont.)

- Failure to note conditions in the crime scene, which require protection
- Failure to isolate the body and immediate surrounding area from further contamination
- Failing to safeguard any evidence present in the crime scene
- Failure to establish a pathway to and from the body
- Evidence transfer



# Course Offerings

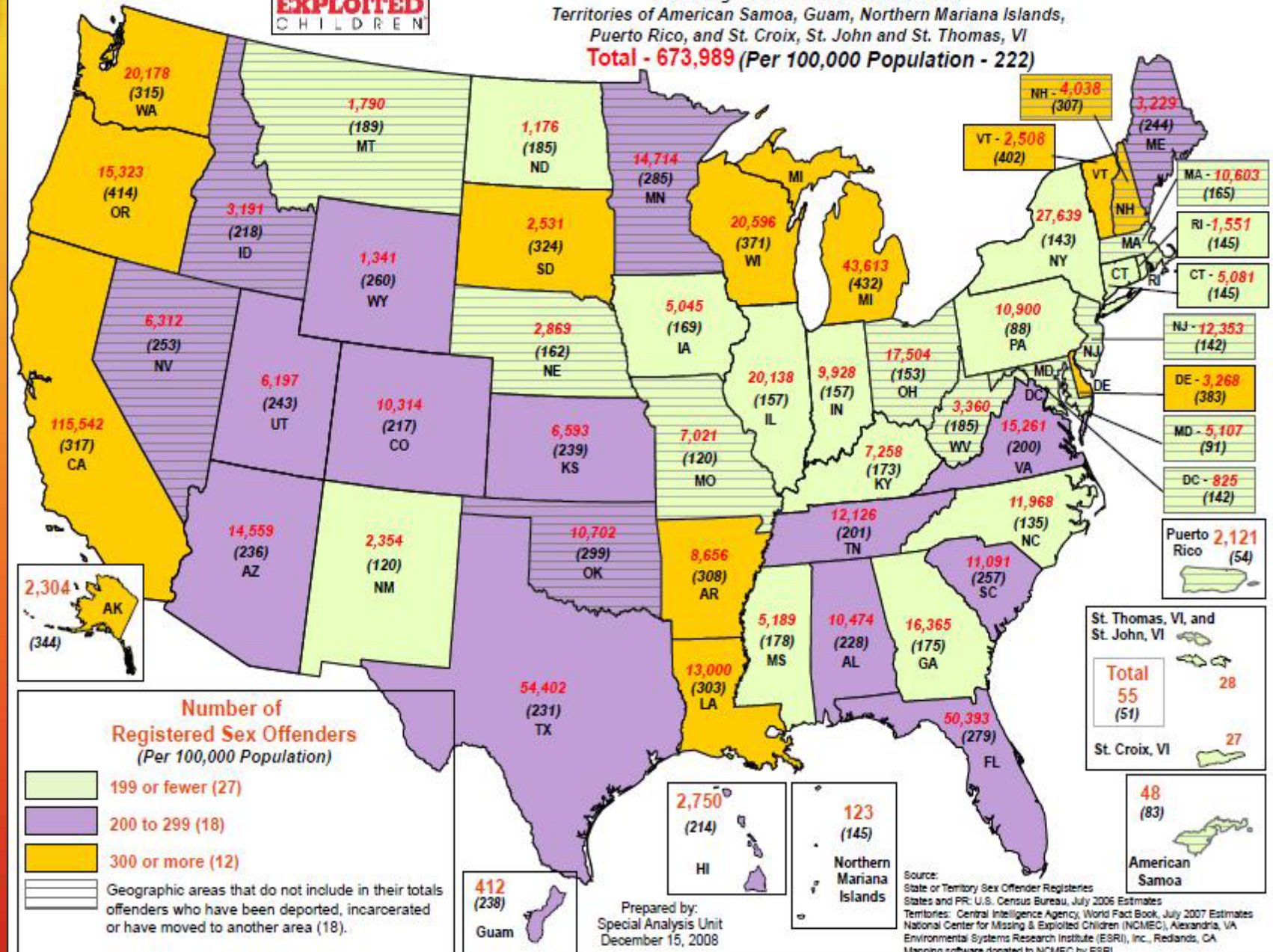
- Investigative Response for Missing and Abducted Children (ISMAC)-3.5 days (prerequisite for SITCAC)
- Child Abduction Response Team (CART)-3.5 days
- Specialized Investigative Techniques in Child Abduction Cases (SITCAC)-3.5 days
- Leadership for Missing and Abducted Children (LMAC)-2 days
- Basic Forensic Response to Missing and Abducted Children-2 days
- Canvassing, Search and Recovery Strategies for Abducted Children-3 days
- CART Certification
- [www.amber-net.org](http://www.amber-net.org)





# REGISTERED SEX OFFENDERS IN THE UNITED STATES PER 100,000 POPULATION

Including the District of Columbia and  
Territories of American Samoa, Guam, Northern Mariana Islands,  
Puerto Rico, and St. Croix, St. John and St. Thomas, VI  
**Total - 673,989 (Per 100,000 Population - 222)**



Source: State or Territory Sex Offender Registries  
States and PR: U.S. Census Bureau, July 2006 Estimates  
Territories: Central Intelligence Agency, World Fact Book, July 2007 Estimates  
National Center for Missing & Exploited Children (NCMEC), Alexandria, VA  
Environmental Systems Research Institute (ESRI), Inc., Redlands, CA  
Mapping software donated to NCMEC by ESRI

Prepared by:  
Special Analysis Unit  
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Questions?

