

Eye technology coming to aid Kane

To help track down missing children

By Gloria Carr
STAFF WRITER

GENEVA — A kind of technology rarely seen outside of science fiction movies will be used to help track missing children in Kane County.

"This is 21st century technology," Sheriff Ken Ramsey said at a press conference Friday. "It will be such an integral part of our lifestyle in the next five to 10 years."

Iris biometric technology essentially is a piece of equipment that takes a high-resolution, digital photo of the iris, said Peter Flynn, senior consultant with the Children's Identification and Location Database, or CHILD, Project.

The information is stored in a national database to be used to identify missing children or adults, he said. Parents can choose not to include their child in the database, but they would be given an identification card with encrypted information and a scan of the iris to be downloaded in the event their child is abducted, he said.

Every person's iris contains different patterns, Flynn said. The iris — the colored part of the eye — is a muscle that protects the retina, he explained. It develops unique patterns and does not change after the first year of life. Iris recognition is so exact that it even can delineate differences in a person's left and right eye.

"It's more accurate than DNA, facial recognition, voice recognition and fingerprints," Flynn said.

Fingerprints for decades have been the common tool that law enforcement agencies use in child abduction cases, but the information usually is kept within the local agency, Flynn said. He expects the database will have 5 million profiles within the next few years as the technology expands.

According to statistics, 900,000 people are reported missing every year, including 2,000 children a day. Most are found quickly, but some are not, he said.

"Those are the ones we want to identify and intercept before they come in harm's way," Flynn said.

Quick and painless

The technology is noninvasive and quick, with no risk of contagious disease or damage to the eye, he said.

Flynn's colleague, Kevin O'Reilly, demonstrated the equipment Friday on 7-year-old Ashleigh and 6-year-old Connor Gentry.

Ashleigh Gentry sat in front of what looked like a camera — called a Panasonic Iris Reader — while a computerized voice directed her to look into the mirror.

"Please open your eyes wider," the voice said.

With the sound of a click, the photo was complete. Within seconds, the database found her profile and displayed a photo of the little girl.

"That's how quick we do it," O'Reilly said.

Connor sat on a chair perched on his knees to reach the equipment and the computer voice repeated the same directions. His information, too, was obtained within seconds. His photo, though, was not as cheery as his sister's.

First in the Midwest

Iridian Technologies, based in New Jersey, is introducing the system in communities across the country, according to a press release. Chief Executive Officer Frank Fitzsimmons said the company is confident that

its technology will be able to "scale exponentially to expedite the reunion of missing persons and their loved ones."

The Kane County Sheriff's Office is the first in the Midwest to launch the CHILD project, the company said.

Ramsey said he plans to use the system in the jail, during the booking process. He hopes it will help sheriff's deputies correctly identify inmates and prevent accidental releases. The sheriff's office has had several of those incidents in the past few years.

Flynn said the iris recognition is being used by American Airlines for its frequent-flier program, a Boston motel and other private companies. The system also can be used to prevent identity theft, he said.

The sheriff's office obtained grants for the \$25,000 equipment.

Capt. Ron Smith handles the department's child identification programs and attends 37 events every year where he fingerprints children. He said the iris recognition biometric technology will be available soon.

Anyone interested can contact Smith at (630) 232-6840.

Steps to take if you think your child is missing

1. If you think your child is missing from home, first make a rapid but thorough search of your house, checking closets, laundry piles, under the beds, inside old refrigerators — anywhere a child might crawl or hide.
2. If you don't find your child, immediately call local police. Be ready to provide a recent photograph, all necessary biographical information and a description of what your child was wearing.
3. Tell police you want them to immediately report your child to the National Crime Information Center (NCIC) Missing Persons File. Federal law requires that police accept your report without a waiting period. The Polly Klaas Foundation further recommends that you ask for a case number with local police and the nine-digit NCIC number, which will be preceded by the letter M. Police may refuse to provide the NCIC number, citing security measures protecting NCIC methods and records.
4. If your child is missing in a store, contact the manager or security officer, then immediately call local police. Some stores have a "Code Adam" plan so that employees mobilize to look for a child.
5. After reporting to local police, contact the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children using its toll-free telephone number 800-THE-LOST (800-843-5678). National Center case managers will track your case and help you produce a poster to help locate your child.
6. If you are the parent or guardian of a missing child and want to be certain NCIC has been alerted, contact your case manager at the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children and ask for confirmation that there is an NCIC record.

SOURCES: The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children; the Polly Klaas Foundation.

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