

Rapid City Journal

Herseith scans technology that finds missing kids

By Katie Brown, Journal Staff Writer – 10/11/06

RAPID CITY - Rep. Stephanie Herseith, D-S.D., met with Pennington County Sheriff Don Holloway Tuesday to launch new technology to locate missing children.



Rep. Stephanie Herseith, left, watches Tuesday as Tom Welby of BI2 Technologies takes a photo of the eyes of Keagan Shankland during a demonstration at the Public Safety Building in Rapid City. (Don Polovich, Journal staff)

The project is called the Children's Identification and Location Database. It is a national database that uses iris recognition biometric technology.

Sean Mullins, president of BI2 Technologies, which provides the technology, said the system scans a child's iris - the colored part of the eyes - and then can positively identify that child should he or she ever become missing.

"This represents and offers new opportunities to better protect and identify children if they should go missing," Herseith said.

Every day, 2,000 children are reported missing in the United States. Mullins said most of them appear at a friend or relative's house or another safe place, but 40,000 children a year end up in high-risk situations.

Herseith heard about the CHILD project and worked to get federal funding to bring it to South Dakota.

"When I first heard about the CHILD project, I recognized its potential," she said. "One missing child is one missing child too many."

Each system costs about \$26,000 and South Dakota received a federal grant to put one system in Pennington County and one in Brown County.

Mullins said that is a one-time cost because once the equipment is in place, there is no fee to use the database.

The CHILD project is completely voluntary and is free of charge to parents. Holloway said he plans to make the technology available to neighboring counties.

A parent can choose to enter the information immediately or save the file and only enter it into the CHILD database if that child becomes missing.

Mullins said the CHILD database system captures the uniqueness of the human iris for identifying purposes. Each iris has 235 unique features. Irises develop during the first year of life and then stay the same for a lifetime.

The system is a high-tech digital camera that can photograph the irises through eyelashes, eye glasses and contact lenses. The rest of the device is simply a lap-top computer.

Mullins and Holloway demonstrated how the system works on 6-year-old Keagan Shankland of Rapid City.

Earlier in the day Keagan's irises had been photographed and his information entered into the database.

When Keagan stood in front of the camera later Tuesday, it snapped a photo of his irises and, within seconds, his information appeared on the computer screen.

An automatic voice told Keagan to open his eyes wider and made the system easy for him to use.

Julie Evenson, Keagan's mother, said she feels good knowing her son is entered in the CHILD system.

"It's nice to know it's a nationwide thing, so if he ever disappears, it will be easier to find him," she said.

Mullins said the system can also be used to identify elderly people, for example those suffering from Alzheimer's.

"The idea here is to intervene before a problem occurs," he said.

Pennington County and Brown County will be the first two counties in the state to use the technology.

Parents interested in having their children's eyes scanned can contact the sheriff's office at 394-6115.

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