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First children 'eye-printed' using new system of ID

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Grasping her photo ID card, 7-year-old Makynna Meegan didn't bat an eye when asked to describe what it was like to get her iris photographed.

"There wasn't any pain or anything," she said matter-of-factly. "But it was hard keeping my eye on the green line."

Makynna and her 9-year-old brother Austin, the children of Metro Police Detective Kristen Zidzik, were among the first ones to be included in the Children's Identification and Location Database (CHILD) Project, a nationwide registry that allows authorities to identify missing children and adults with iris biometric technology.



"I think anything to help find missing kids in the event that they can't speak for themselves is a good thing," Zidzik said after a demonstration for the media at Metro's Bolden Area Command on Tuesday morning. The iris, the colored membrane that surrounds the pupil of the eye, stretches in the first six months after birth.

STEPHENIE Collins, 9, has her photo taken Tuesday during a demonstration of iris-recognition technology at the Metro Police Bolden Area Command.
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It leaves marks that are unique to every person, and 12 times more unique than fingerprints, said Sean Mullin, president of The Child Project, based in Massachusetts. The CHILD Project is meant to augment other ways of identifying children, such as fingerprinting.

Metro is the first police department in Nevada and the seventh in the nation to adopt this technology, and Sheriff Bill Young said it could also be used to confirm the identity of inmates to avoid erroneous releases.

"I see the iris scan technology as being a very viable tool," Young said.

The CHILD Project system works like this: The child or an adult who could get lost because of an affliction such as Alzheimer's disease sits about a foot from a camera and lines his eyes up with two green ovals.

The camera photographs the eye, and within 12 seconds a high-resolution digital image of the iris is created, which can be stored on the database. The image can be checked against the database, which enables police to establish the true identity of runaways and children who are abducted.



CHILD Project President Sean Mullin talks about iris-recognition technology at the Metro Police Bolden Area Command on Tuesday.

The matching process takes about four seconds, quicker than fingerprint comparisons.

"Fingerprint technology is a very large file that takes a long time to search for and retrieve and make a positive ID," Mullin said.

If a parent or guardian doesn't want his or her child's iris biometric information stored in the database, they can request an identification card showing the child's picture and the iris information encrypted as a bar code.

The system automatically deletes the child's record on the child's 18th birthday, authorities said.

Sgt. Tom Wagner of Metro's missing persons detail, said the department and Nevada Child Seekers intend to bring the system to schools and community gatherings. The system will be available to all of Southern Nevada. "We're excited about it," he said. The information is maintained by the Nation's Missing Children Organization and Center for Missing Adults.

Republic Services, Barrick Gold Corp. and a local family donated the \$25,000 that allowed the department to purchase the system.

Parents can learn more about the program by contacting Nevada Child Seekers at 458-7009.



A CHILD (Children's Identification and Location Database) Project System is displayed during a demonstration of iris-recognition technology at the Metro Police Bolden Area Command on Tuesday.

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