

Missing Children —A One-Year Progress Report

By Sheriff Robert J. Garvey, Hampshire County Sheriff's Office

When Sheriff Robert Garvey of the Hampshire County Sheriff's Office in Northampton, MA officially launched the Children's Identification and Location Database (The Child Project™) Project in May 2005, he expressed his hope that over the coming years every Sheriff in the nation would have The Child Project™ Iris Recognition System at their disposal. Since Sheriff Garvey first brought the idea to the National Sheriffs' Association in June 2004, and the National Sheriffs' Association (NSA) endorsed the project, nearly 1,700 Sheriffs across the nation have asked to participate in this effort.

As of July, 2006 The Child Project™, which enrolls, identifies, and locates children using iris-biometric recognition technology, has been deployed in Sheriffs' Offices in 20 states across the nation. By the time this article is published, Sheriffs in 13 more states will have been implemented bringing the total network to 33 states in 18 months.

The Child Project™ is a secure, nationwide network and registry enabling

law enforcement and social service agencies to positively identify missing children and adults using iris recognition biometric technology.

"A single click of the camera could help make the difference between a missing child or runaway winding up in harms way or making it home safely," said Sheriff Garvey. "This technology enables us to intervene before a tragedy occurs in a child's life."

The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) estimates that on average more than 2,000 children are reported missing every day across the nation. According to the Federal Bureau of Investigation's National Crime Information Center (NCIC), as of February 1, 2006 there were 108,949 active cases of missing children and adults in NCIC. A quick look at the statistics reveals the scope of the problem:

Of the 108,949 active missing person cases: 62,923 are children; 19,689 are listed as endangered; and, 7,660 are listed as involuntarily missing.

With thousands of children and adults reported missing across the nation each day, Sheriffs are always looking for new methods to help reunite missing persons with their loved ones. Weber County (Utah) Sheriff Brad Slater implemented The Child Project™ system in June 2006. Sheriff Slater said his office is often asked to help parents with child-identification programs, and having the record of a child's iris available nationally will give searchers one more tool to find lost children. "We do these things as a community service," he said. "This is another component of crime prevention."

The Child Project™ system uses a specialized video camera to capture a detailed close-up of both irises. The system makes a template or 'map' of each person's iris pattern for storage in the system. To verify identity later, the child simply looks at the camera, and the system compares the patterns in the individual's irises against the templates stored in the national database. If there's a match, the identity is verified and the child is identified and located.

The Nation's Missing Children Organization (NMCO), a non-profit agency providing nationwide assistance to law enforcement and families of missing persons, hosts the database at its headquarters in Phoenix, Arizona. Unlike fingerprint, voice, facial or photo ID card programs, data obtained using the Iris Recognition System will never become obsolete because people's iris patterns remain the same for life after one year from birth. ☪

WANTED

Sheriff magazine is looking for photographs of Sheriffs in action. We need sharp, clear, color photos (high resolution of 300 dpi) depicting what you do best; on the job, in the streets, in the air, or on the water. Ideally, your office badge or the words "Sheriff" should be visible.

Please submit photos to: Susan Crow at scrow@sheriffs.org by email, or on cd by mail. If the images are too large to send via email, please contact Susan at 703.838.5335.

For more information on The Child Project™, please contact Patricia Lawton at 508-224-1600 ext. 309 or via e-mail at plawton@thechildproject.org.