

# **THE WINSTON CHURCHILL MEMORIAL TRUST OF AUSTRALIA**

**Report by**

**MARK SAMWAYS**

**2006 Churchill Fellow**

**To study missing persons cases with a focus on risk assessment models, investigation methods, missing persons procedures, and communication between law enforcement agencies and non-government organisations.**



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Signed:

Date: 22 February 2007

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All involved with the Trust for their confidence in my ability, their recognition of the importance of people who are missing in our community and support with all logistical and planning matters.

Commissioner Ken Moroney and the NSW Police Force for encouraging and supporting me in my quest to gain knowledge to enable our Police to provide a better service to the community.

The individuals and agencies I visited overseas for showing me immense hospitality and being willing to share a 'warts & all' view of their work.

The families of missing persons who continually amaze me with the courage and dignity they display.

The individuals and organisations that I work with in Australia that strive to provide the best outcomes for missing persons and their families.

My mother and father, Maureen and Terry for their never ending support.

My wonderful sons, Joel and Kieren, for allowing dad to 'disappear' overseas for such a long period of time. They continue to be my inspiration.

My partner, Elizabeth, who supported me at every stage of the way with encouragement, patience, love and understanding.



*"To protect those who are not able to protect themselves is a duty which every one owes to society."*

Sir Edward Macnaghten

## **INTRODUCTION**

Each year over 30,000 people are reported missing to police. In 2006 over 10,000 people were reported missing in New South Wales alone. According to the Australian Institute of Criminology, in the year 2000 the annual number of missing persons cases exceeded the total number of victims reported to police for homicide, sexual assault, and unarmed robbery combined.

The phenomenon of persons is not unique to Australia. Missing persons span both sexes, all ages, social classes and geographical areas. Per capita, the incidence of people going missing in Australia is consistent with other western nations.

In Australia men and women are reported in almost equal numbers. Children and young people constitute more than half of all missing persons cases. People go missing for all sorts of reasons with most missing persons not being the subject of a criminal act. Some people go missing because of mental health problems whilst others voluntarily disappear to escape abuse or other circumstances such as family conflict or financial pressures. Many young people are simply rebelling against the rules imposed upon them by parents and carers.

Regardless of the reasons behind someone going missing, all missing persons, especially children, may be vulnerable whilst missing and at risk of becoming victims or perpetrators of crime. Locating missing persons and discovering the reasons behind their disappearance requires significant Police and community resources.

It is estimated that for every missing person at least 12 people are directly affected. Families and friends, work and school colleagues and the community as a whole are all affected when a single person goes missing. Each year, nearly 2 per cent of our population is affected by having someone they know go missing. There are significant social and economic costs to the Australian community in having so many people reported missing each year.

Unfortunately there is no national uniform method of dealing with missing persons cases. The primary agency for dealing with missing persons is the Police Force in each State and Territory. The various Police Forces have different policies and procedures. Even the definition of what constitutes a 'missing person' is interpreted differently from state to state. In recent years, the National Missing Persons Coordination Centre, established by the Australian Federal Police, has made significant progress in providing some cohesion to the way in which missing persons cases are managed across the nation. However, there is much more work to be done.

Serious offences such as murder, where the offender has hidden the body of the victim, may often start with a missing persons report, but may remain unrecognised as a crime if the missing persons case is not adequately investigated.

In Australia there is a lack of guidance for Police in the field who have to respond to missing persons reports; their learning being largely obtained 'on the job'. As most missing persons return safely, it is easy for Police to dismiss missing persons cases as a time consuming, low priority area of policing. A lack of procedures, training and expertise may result in the inefficient use of Police resources. Missing persons and those reporting them to Police suffer as a result.



## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

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My Fellowship travel was undertaken between 14 October 2006 and 7 December 2006. The aim of my Fellowship was to study missing persons cases with a focus on risk assessment models, investigation methods, missing persons procedures, and communication between law enforcement agencies and non-government organisations.

I visited law enforcement and non-government organisations in Hong Kong, the Netherlands, England, Canada and the United States of America. The Fellowship provided me with the opportunity to establish international relationships with government and non-government agencies working with missing persons and their families.

### **Highlights**

- Learning of the tremendous work of non-government organisations and how they play an important role in assisting, and in some cases exceeding, the efforts of law enforcement agencies.
- Witnessing the professionalism of those working for law enforcement agencies throughout the world whose task it is to locate missing persons.
- Attending a seminar at the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children with over 40 police officers from all around the USA.
- Observing how legislators and government administrators play an important role in ensuring that the issue of missing persons and investigations are given the attention they deserve.
- Visiting the FBI and observing how the many facets of that organisation such as behavioural analysis, facial reconstruction, photo age progression, and DNA testing combine to assist local law enforcement agencies investigate missing persons cases.

### **Recommendations**

Combining the findings from my overseas research conducted as part of my Churchill Fellowship and my observations working in the field of missing persons in Australia, I have made 16 recommendations which are listed below:

1. A national database be developed on which all missing persons are entered as soon as possible after being reported to police.

2. Certain categories of professionals (eg. social workers, health care workers, airport security) be given limited search access to a national database of missing persons.
3. Children subject of parental abductions should be regarded as legitimate missing persons. Missing persons reports for these children should be accepted and investigated by police.
4. Missing children be interviewed by police upon their return to ascertain whether they were victims of crime either before going missing or whilst they were missing.
5. Missing children data be collected and used to: prepare a national profile of missing children, identify trends, identify the level of victimisation of children, and identify the level and type of crime committed by missing children.
6. The high incidence of children going missing from the care of the State be addressed at a national level.
7. The high incidence of missing persons with mental health problems be addressed at a national level.
8. Research be conducted to gain a better understanding of groups that may be at particular risk (eg. the young, the elderly, people with mental health concerns) and of the range of circumstances that make going missing more likely.
9. Prevention strategies be developed to reduce the incidence of missing persons. Advice, information, counselling and mediation be made available at an early point may help individuals seek alternative strategies for managing their problems.
10. An AMBER alert or similar system be adopted by all states and territories.
11. Federal legislation be enacted that mandates amongst other things:
  - a national definition of a missing person
  - the minimum law enforcement response (including risk assessment and investigation) to missing persons cases
  - the sharing of information between agencies
  - the collation, analysis and distribution of missing persons data
12. Australia hosts an international symposium on missing persons.
13. A comprehensive missing persons investigative guide be developed and made available to all police. Such a guide should form the basis for each jurisdiction's Standard Operating Procedures.
14. National standard procedures be developed for the investigation of unidentified persons and remains.
15. A specialised service providing support to the families and friends of missing persons be developed in each State and Territory. Families of missing people have continuing needs for advice, practical help and emotional support, including access to professional counselling.
16. Each State and Territory Police Force establish and resource a centralised Missing Persons Unit to assist local police with the investigation of 'high

risk' missing persons cases and to provide a coordinated agency response to all missing persons cases.

### **Implementation and Dissemination**

- My report will be submitted to the Federal Government via the National Missing Persons Coordination Centre (NMCC) which is an arm of the Australian Federal Police.
- The NMCC will be asked to disseminate my report to all State and Territory Police Forces.
- My report will be submitted to the NSW Commissioner of Police and the NSW Minister for Police.
- I will be using my findings in my work with the NSW Police Missing Persons Unit.
- I will be submitting an article for publication in several Police journals.
- My findings will be presented to the Missing Persons Interagency Forum hosted by the NSW Attorney General's Department.
- My report will be posted on a number of websites for public viewing.





## MAIN BODY

### **Explanatory Note**

During my Fellowship travel I visited many overseas law enforcement and government agencies. All of the organisations I visited were very willing to share their risk assessment models, policies and procedures, investigation methods and generally assist me by providing an in-depth look at how they 'do business'. When visiting these organisations, it was not my intention to critique their policies or practices, but instead examine how they deal with missing persons to develop a model of best practice for Australia.

As such, much of the information I gathered is restricted and cannot be shared with those outside the field of law enforcement. Therefore, I feel that if I was to provide in this Report, a detailed analysis of how each organisation operates it may prove detrimental to the international relationships I developed, to the security of those organisations and to my goal of improving the Australian response to missing persons cases.

I have listed below the organisations I visited in conducting my research and developing my Recommendations. The information I have provided relating to the non-government organisations I visited is available in the public domain and there are no security issues with me providing such information in this Report.

I have an abundance of printed and electronic information gathered from my travel and more than willing to discuss my findings and provide specific, detailed information to fellow law enforcement officials around Australia upon request.

### **Risk Assessment models, Law enforcement policies and procedures, Investigation methods**

- **Hong Kong Island Regional Missing Persons Unit** – Hong Kong Police – Hong Kong
- **National Missing Persons Bureau** – Netherlands Police Agency – Zoetermeer, Netherlands
- **Police National Missing Persons Bureau (New Scotland Yard)** – London, England
- **Operation Compass** – Metropolitan Police – London, England
- **Shoreditch Police Missing Persons Bureau**- Metropolitan Police – London, England
- **Missing Persons Squad** – New York City Police Department – New York, New York, USA

- **Behavioral Analysis Unit II (Crimes Against Adults)** – Critical Incident Response Group – Federal Bureau of Investigation – US Department of Justice – Quantico, Virginia, USA
- **Behavioral Analysis Unit III (Crimes Against Children)** – Critical Incident Response Group – Federal Bureau of Investigation – US Department of Justice – Quantico, Virginia, USA
- **Violent Criminal Apprehension Program** - Critical Incident Response Group – Federal Bureau of Investigation – US Department of Justice – Quantico, Virginia, USA
- **FBI Laboratory Division** - Federal Bureau of Investigation – US Department of Justice – Quantico, Virginia, USA
- **Missing Persons and Unidentified Bodies/Remains Unit** - Behavioural Sciences Section - Ontario Provincial Police – Orillia, Ontario, Canada
- **National Missing Children Services** – Royal Canadian Mounted Police – Ottawa, Ontario, Canada
- **Missing & Unidentified Persons Unit** - Violent Crime Information Center- California Department of Justice – Sacramento, California, USA
- **Missing Persons Detail** – Los Angeles Police Department – Los Angeles, California, USA

## **Role of Non-government Organisations**

### **National Missing Persons Helpline – London, England**

The National Missing Persons Helpline (NMPH) is dedicated to helping missing people, their families and those who care for them. NMPH was established as a charity in 1993.

The principal objective of NMPH is to provide ongoing support for those who require it, performing this task on behalf of the whole family in a caring, understanding and compassionate manner. Staff from NMPH attempt to make contact with missing people of all ages assuring others of their safety, reuniting them if appropriate and offering to act as an intermediary where required.

NMPH endeavours to support the police service, recognising their primary role in finding missing people and also works in partnership with other organisations, both governmental and non-governmental, exchanging best practice to further the above aims.

Wherever possible in the UK and abroad, NMPH raises awareness and knowledge

of the issue of missing persons.

NMPH also provides a range of other services relating to missing people, including:

#### *Identification and Reconstruction*

The ID & Reconstruction Department can conduct searches of its databases for possible matches of unidentified persons, both alive and dead (several of the victims of Fred and Rose West in the Cromwell Street murder enquiry were identified due to the NMPH database). Forensic artists are able to modify post mortem photographs and create 3D clay reconstructions on skeletal remains to aid identification. NMPH launched Britain's first on-line database of unidentified people in 2003. A dedicated section of the website contains forensic images and descriptions of unidentified people found in the UK and registered with NMPH. The forensic artists can also manipulate photographs on computer, to age the image of long-term missing children. The resulting age progressions can help generate new publicity and hope for the families of the missing.

#### *Media and Communications*

Publicity is one of the key tools for finding vulnerable missing persons. NMPH has built up a range of media partners who provide assistance with regular appeals for vulnerable missing people. NMPH has a growing database of national contacts for the distribution of missing persons posters.

The NMPH Communications Department issues over 200 missing persons appeals each month through a variety of regular sources, including: weekly television slots, national newspapers, the Big Issue magazine, MoMedia bus plasma screens and Ford lorries. NMPH also provides ad-hoc publicity on cases to local and national media. All appeals carry the NMPH number and 'sighting' calls are taken by trained staff and volunteers.

NMPH operates three national Freephone helplines and comprehensive websites:

#### *National Missing Persons Helpline - 0500 700 700 / [www.missingpersons.org](http://www.missingpersons.org)*

The helpline to call if someone has a missing loved one. As well as providing advice and support, once a case is registered, staff and volunteers try to reunite families by searching for missing people via a network of contacts and sources throughout the UK, Europe and beyond. This is also the helpline thousands call each year with sightings of missing persons that NMPH publicises.

#### *Message Home - 0800 700 740 / [www.messagehome.org.uk](http://www.messagehome.org.uk)*

Message Home is for adults who have left home to send a message to their family or carer, to seek confidential advice, and if necessary to be helped to a place of safety, which can reduce a caller's time of vulnerability.

### Runaway Helpline - 0808 800 70 70 / [www.runawayhelpline.org.uk](http://www.runawayhelpline.org.uk)

Offers support and advice to young runaways. Callers can leave a message for NMPH to pass on to a relative, social worker or carer and can request help and advice. Often young people who have run away feel that they cannot make direct contact with their family or carer, even to phone someone to say that they are alive and safe. The Runaway Helpline can act as a non-judgmental intermediary. The Runaway Helpline can also offer help to the victims of trafficking. Trained staff deal with victims of this crime, offering advice and support with complete confidentiality. It offers hope to those who may otherwise be in a hopeless situation. The initiative is the first of its kind in the UK.

### Working with Police

On the 21st December 2006 ACPO, the Association of Chief Police Officers, signed a National Protocol Agreement with NMPH, to exchange, handle and respond to the issue of missing persons. This agreement which will be used by every police force in England, Wales, and Northern Ireland, recognises the important work of each in the area of missing persons and will bring significant benefits to the field:

- a higher resolution rate for cases of missing and unidentified persons as improved information will point to potential improvements in investigation;
- the increase of public protection and enhanced community safety by saving police resources to target those persons considered at greater risk of coming to harm or of causing harm to others;
- the protocol will produce the most comprehensive database of missing and unidentified persons in the UK. This will allow Police and National Missing Persons Helpline to see the scope of the 'missing' problem for the first time, leading to new research, prevention strategies and greater understanding.

Since 1996, NMPH has been concerned with the issue of human trafficking and is part of a network of statutory and non-statutory organisations attempting to deal with this crime. In 2001 NMPH compiled the first Counter Trafficking Directory.

### Working with Social Services – Missing from Care

NMPH has a UK-wide Social Services National Protocol. As well as offering on-going advice and support to families, foster carers and social workers, a dedicated team within the Case Management Department deals only with children missing from government care.

### Education

NMPH encourages preventative action and has been involved with a number of initiatives, most recently the development of an education pack for schools. 'Running Away: A Cry for Help?' targets 11 – 14 year olds and aims to develop life skills that empower young people to cope with some of the personal problems and family conflicts that can cause them to run away.

### **National Center for Missing Adults – Phoenix, Arizona USA**

The National Center for Missing Adults (NCMA) is a division of Nation's Missing Children Organization, Inc. (NMCO) - a non-profit organization working in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Justice Bureau of Justice Assistance, Office of Justice Programs.

The National Center for Missing Adults (NCMA) was formally established after the passage of Kristen's Law (H.R. 2780) by the 106th United States Congress on October 26th, 2000. NCMA operates as the national clearinghouse for missing adults, providing services and coordination between various government agencies, law enforcement, media, and most importantly - the families of missing adults. NCMA also maintains a national database of missing adults determined to be "endangered" or otherwise at-risk.

NCMA performs the following core legally mandated functions:

- to establish and maintain a national clearinghouse for missing adults;
- to assist law enforcement and families in locating missing adults;
- to serve as a national repository of information accessible to the general public, advocacy groups, and law enforcement for the purpose of tracking missing adults who are determined by law enforcement to be endangered due to age, diminished mental capacity, or the circumstances of disappearance are suspicious, when foul play is suspected or circumstances are unknown;
- to maintain statistical information of adults reported as missing;
- to provide informational resources and referrals to families of missing adults;
- to assist in public notification and provide victim advocacy related to missing adults;
- to develop and deliver training to improve law enforcement response to missing adults and their families through training and promotion of best practices in service delivery.

Since 2001 the NCMA has served as a national resource centre for missing adults; provided training to investigative law enforcement officers to prepare such officers to appropriately respond to missing adult cases; worked in cooperation with the Bureau of Justice Assistance and the Office for Victims of Crime of the Department of Justice, the International Homicide Investigators Association, and many other agencies in the effort to find missing adults and prevent victimisation; and provided policy training to police chiefs and sheriffs regarding the issue of missing adults.

NCMA strives to provide effective services, while continually working to develop new and innovative programs to address changing needs. The services provided

vary with each individual case. NCMA works at the direction of the investigating law enforcement agency to help preserve the integrity of the case and will not participate in activities that may hinder the investigation.

Although the demand for the services of the National Center for Missing Adults is growing substantially the level of government funding has decreased each year and the organisation is relying more on corporate and private donations.

### **National Center for Missing & Exploited Children – Alexandria, Virginia USA**

The National Center for Missing & Exploited Children's (NCMEC) mission is to help prevent child abduction and sexual exploitation; help find missing children; and assist victims of child abduction and sexual exploitation, their families, and the professionals who serve them.

NCMEC was established in 1984 as a private, non-profit organisation to provide services nationwide for families and professionals in the prevention of abducted, endangered, and sexually exploited children. Pursuant to its mission and its congressional mandates, NCMEC:

- serves as a clearinghouse of information about missing and exploited children;
- operates a CyberTipline that the public may use to report Internet-related child sexual exploitation;
- provides technical assistance to individuals and law-enforcement agencies in the prevention, investigation, prosecution, and treatment of cases involving missing and exploited children;
- assists the U.S. Department of State in certain cases of international child abduction in accordance with the Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction;
- offers training programs to law-enforcement and social-service professionals;
- distributes photographs and descriptions of missing children worldwide;
- coordinates child-protection efforts with the private sector;
- networks with non-profit service providers and state clearinghouses about missing-persons cases;
- provides information about effective state legislation to help ensure the protection of children;

The services offered by NCMEC are many and varied and reach across the entire USA and indeed the world.

### **Missing Children Society of Canada – Calgary, Ontario Canada**

The Missing Children Society of Canada (MCSC) is a registered, national non-profit organization dedicated to the search for runaway and abducted children. MCSC provides a comprehensive Investigative Search Program, free of charge, to assist police and searching parents in the active and ongoing search for missing children.

The objectives of MCSC are:

- to actively search for, and locate, children who have been reported missing to police on cases involving runaways, parental abductions, stranger abductions, international parental abductions and young adults at-risk;
- to assist law enforcement and the searching parent(s) in their search for missing children through active, professional investigations, accumulation of information, and distribution of photographs and related information;
- to establish an international network of professionals in related fields to assist in the search and recovery of missing children;
- to act as a liaison, when necessary, between the searching parent(s), law enforcement, the legal profession, the courts and/or the media;
- to provide ongoing hope and moral support to the searching parent(s) and their families;
- to provide safety and educational programs to promote public awareness of missing children and the services provided by the Missing Children Society of Canada;
- to raise the funds necessary to develop and maintain the programs and services provided by the Society;
- to develop a list of referral services to include professional counsellors, psychologists, legal, and medical professionals and any other services available to further assist runaway children, victims of abduction, their parents and families.

MCSC's Investigative Search Program, "Project: Reunite", is unique – the only one of its kind in Canada. The comprehensive, hands-on program was developed as a resource for police and searching families; to facilitate the active and ongoing search for runaway and abducted children.

MCSC provide assistance on cases involving runaways, parental abductions, stranger abductions and young adults at risk. The Society maintains a close working relationship with the police officers involved in the case. MCSC helped approximately 600 families in 2000 and was successful in closing 93% of the cases registered with the Society last year.

The primary function of "Project: Reunite" is the investigation of missing children cases. Every registered case is worked by a team of professional investigators who

have had many years experience, and extensive training, in interview and investigative techniques.

MCSC takes a hands-on approach in the search for a missing child which often involves travel to gather or eliminate information on a case. Investigators are involved with everything from interviewing witnesses and other relevant persons, to participation and management of search activities, door to door enquiries, or working with the reconnect and front line workers on the streets in search of a runaway.

To ensure that every resource available is utilised in the search for a missing child, MCSC has developed an international network of professionals and volunteers in specialised fields which allows access to scent and cadaver dogs, dive teams, professional search personnel, composite artists, hypnotists, graphologists, polygraphists, statement analysis professionals, medical doctors and other related professionals.

The Pegasus Imaging System allows staff to scan the missing child's photograph into a computer and fax a photo-quality poster, along with any known suspect, or relevant case information, immediately to border crossings, bus depots, airports, police stations and any other front line groups across North America.

Poster and photo distributions are targeted to ensure more efficient and effective results. A poster distribution becomes a tool for investigators after they have identified an area as a possible "hot spot" of information and need to generate new information in that area. Once these hot spots have been identified MCSC takes into account the habits and behaviours of the abductor or missing child and the distribution is targeted to the appropriate locations.

MCSC maintains a toll free, international tip line that is answered by an operator 24 hours per day, seven days per week to receive tips and information about missing children.

Due to the vast scope of its caseload, it is impossible for MCSC to maintain a traditional support program for searching families so MCSC developed a telephone support program. The program is simple. A parent of a missing child is put in telephone contact with another searching parent. Support parents who have agreed to be part of the program, either have or have had, a child missing from the same category as the parent requesting support. Attempts are made to match parents who live in close proximity to each other. This program provides a valuable support tool to parents who are still searching for their missing children.

When necessary, MCSC provides liaison and/or referral services to further assist runaway children, victims of abduction, their parents and families. The Society



maintains a list of professional counsellors, psychologists, legal professionals, medical professionals and any other services available that may be of support and assistance to children and families.

In certain cases involving stranger abductions or unknown disappearances, MCSC will offer rewards for information leading to the child's whereabouts.



## CONTACT AGENCIES

During the course of my Churchill Fellowship I met with many people from each of the organisations I visited. I have listed my main point of contact at each of the organisations. The contributions of the many individuals who I have not listed were nevertheless integral to the completion of my project.

<b>ORGANISATION</b>	<b>CONTACT DETAILS</b>
Hong Kong Police Force	<i>W/Inspector Melinda Fong</i> Hong Kong Island Regional Missing Persons Unit 1 Arsenal Street, Wanchai. Hong Kong Island Hong Kong
Netherlands Police Agency (KLPD)	<i>Superintendent Carlo Schippers</i> National Missing Persons Bureau Europaweg 45, 2711 EM Zoetermeer Netherlands
New Scotland Yard	<i>Ms Davinia Darch</i> UK Police National Missing Persons Bureau New Scotland Yard. 10 Broadway, London W1H0BG United Kingdom
Metropolitan Police Service	<i>Sergeant Andy Gartan</i> Missing Persons Unit, Hackney Borough Shoreditch Police Station 4-6 Shepherdess Walk, Shoreditch, London N1 7LF United Kingdom
Operation Compass	<i>Detective Constable Ruth Tye</i> Operation Compass, Metropolitan Police Service Territorial Policing Headquarters Victoria Embankment, London SW1A 2JA United Kingdom
National Missing Persons Helpline	<i>Ms Sash Newman</i> NMPH 284 Upper Richmond Road West, East Sheen London SW1 47JE United Kingdom

New York City Police Department	<p><i>Detective Masterson</i>  NYPD Missing Persons Squad  18-22 Jackson Avenue, New York, New York 10002  United States of America</p>
Federal Bureau of Investigation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Critical Incident Response Group</li> <li>• National Center for the Analysis of Violent Crime <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Behavioral Analysis Unit – II</li> <li>- Behavioral Analysis Unit – III</li> <li>- Violent Criminal Apprehension Program</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p><i>(Names &amp; contact details withheld for security reasons)</i>  Quantico, Virginia 22135  United States of America</p>
Ontario Provincial Police	<p><i>Detective Senior Sergeant Anne Moore</i>  Manager Missing Persons and Unidentified  Bodies/Remains Unit  Behavioural Sciences Section  Ontario Provincial Police  777 Memorial Avenue, Orillia. Ontario L3V 7V3  Canada</p>
National Center for Missing & Exploited Children	<p><i>Mr Peter Banks</i>  NCMEC Director of Training &amp; Outreach  699 Prince Street, Alexandria Virginia 22314  United States of America</p>
Royal Canadian Mounted Police	<p><i>Staff Sergeant Roger Martin</i>  Manager  National Missing Children Services  Royal Canadian Mounted Police  PO Box 8885, Ottawa, Ontario K1G 3M8  Canada</p>
Missing Children Society of Canada	<p><i>Ms Rhonda Morgan</i>  Executive Director MCSC  3501 23 Street NE, Calgary, Alberta T2E 6V8  Canada</p>
California Department of Justice	<p><i>Ms Gayle Hirahara</i>  Supervisor  Missing &amp; Unidentified Persons Unit  Violent Crime Information Center  California Department of Justice  P.O. Box 944255, Sacramento, California 94244  United States of America</p>

National Center for Missing Adults *Ms Kym Pasqualini*  
Chief Executive Officer  
NCMA  
4641 North 12<sup>th</sup> Street, Phoenix, Arizona 85014  
United States of America

Los Angeles Police Department *Detective Bruce Kuehl*  
Missing Persons Detail  
Detective Headquarters Division  
Los Angeles Police Department  
150 N Los Angeles St, Los Angeles, California 90012  
United State of America



## CONCLUSIONS

The majority of missing persons return soon after their disappearance without suffering any harm. A small percentage, however, will come to harm or become victims of crime. It cannot be overlooked that the initial missing persons report may be the start of a major criminal investigation that a missing person's life may depend upon. It is too easy for Police to dismiss missing persons as a low priority area of policing.

An important consideration for Police when investigating missing persons cases is to provide support to the family and friends of the missing person. Those 'left behind' may be suffering as much as any victim of a criminal act.

The priorities of Police when responding to missing persons reports should be:

- ensure that every report of a missing person is risk assessed so that missing persons who may be vulnerable or represent high risk are immediately identified;
- properly investigate reports of missing persons using staff that are properly trained for such investigations;
- preserve evidence where a crime may have been committed;
- have clear policies and procedures which describe the agency response to missing persons report;
- adopt a proactive multi-agency approach to dealing with missing persons;
- support the needs of the family and others close to the missing person.

Each Australian Police Force should as a priority:

- implement a comprehensive policy and information system which supports information sharing within the organisation and with other Police Forces and professional agencies;
- ensure that every report of a missing person is risk assessed, effectively resourced, investigated, supervised and managed;
- ensure that staff that deal with missing persons cases are adequately trained;
- ensure the effective management of all aspects of missing persons investigations including transparent review processes;
- develop a comprehensive investigation manual to assist Police deal with missing persons cases.



## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

As a result of my Churchill Fellowship I make the following recommendations:

1. A national database be developed on which all missing persons are entered as soon as possible after being reported to police.
2. Certain categories of professionals (eg. social workers, health care workers, airport security) be given limited search access to a national database of missing persons.
3. Children subject of parental abductions should be regarded as legitimate missing persons. Missing persons reports for these children should be accepted and investigated by police.
4. Missing children be interviewed by police upon their return to ascertain whether they were victims of crime either before going missing or whilst they were missing.
5. Missing children data be collected and used to: prepare a national profile of missing children, identify trends, identify the level of victimisation of children, and identify the level and type of crime committed by missing children.
6. The high incidence of children going missing from the care of the State be addressed at a national level.
7. The high incidence of missing persons with mental health problems be addressed at a national level.
8. Research be conducted to gain a better understanding of groups that may be at particular risk (eg. the young, the elderly, people with mental health concerns) and of the range of circumstances that make going missing more likely.
9. Prevention strategies be developed to reduce the incidence of missing persons. Advice, information, counselling and mediation be made available at an early point may help individuals seek alternative strategies for managing their problems.
10. An AMBER alert or similar system be adopted by all states and territories.
11. Federal legislation be enacted that mandates among other things:
  - a national definition of a missing person;
  - the minimum law enforcement response (including risk assessment and investigation) to missing persons cases;
  - the sharing of information between agencies;
  - the collation, analysis and distribution of missing persons data.
12. Australia hosts an international symposium on missing persons.
13. A comprehensive missing persons investigative guide be developed and made available to all police. Such a guide should form the basis for each jurisdiction's Standard Operating Procedures.
14. National standard procedures be developed for the investigation of unidentified persons and remains.

15. A specialised service providing support to the families and friends of missing persons be developed in each State and Territory. Families of missing people have continuing needs for advice, practical help and emotional support, including access to professional counselling.
16. Each State and Territory Police Force establish and resource a centralised Missing Persons Unit to assist local police with the investigation of 'high risk' missing persons cases and to provide a coordinated agency response to all missing persons cases.



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