MISSING CHILDREN'S TASK FORCE MEETING
OCTOBER 21, 2002
3:00 P.M.

PRESENT:

Sharon McPhail, Detroit City Council Member
Alan Amen, Exec. Asst., Community Outreach-Wayne Co. Sheriff's Dept.
Richard Anderson, Director, Traveler's Aid Society
Paula Banks, Director, My Sister's Place
Hershell Bell, Manager, SE Michigan Residential and Small Business
Sekai Broaden, Director, Family Division, 3rd Circuit Court
Dorene Brown, Family Support Consultant, WSU Urban Families Program
L.C. Caldwell, Legislative Liaison, Council Member Collins' Office
Billie Christian, Chief Operating Officer, Children's Aid Society
Gerald Cliff, Inspector/Commanding Officer, Crimes Against Persons/Property
Sean P. Dennedy, ADT Security Services
Leonard Dixon, Exec. Director, Wayne County Juvenile Detention Facility
Michael Duggan, Prosecuting Attorney, Wayne County Prosecutor's Office
Tara T. Dunlop, 3rd Deputy Chief, Detroit Police Dept., Corporate Communications
Dwayne Dye, Assistant Director, Nu Solutionx
James Elliot, Lieut. Detroit Police Department, Armed Robbery Unit/Kidnapping
Kay Farrell, Director, Intensive Court Services, 3rd Circuit Court, Juvenile Division
Shelly Foy, Lieutenant, Detroit Police Department, Abused Children
Amanda Good, Executive Director, Alternative for Girls
Marianne Grazioli, Chapter Leader, Parents of Murdered Children, Inc. (POMC)
Calvin Hughes, Council Member Mc'Phail's Office
Brenda Adams, Council Member Tinsley-Talabi's Office
Dale Foster, Council Member Tinsley-Talabi's Office
Steven Miller, Council Member McPhail's Office
Denise Gibson, Council Member McPhail's Office
Jacqueline Lawrence, Parents of Murdered Children, Inc. (POMC)
Kevin Jones, Detroit Police Department, Corporate Commuications
Greg Jones, Sergeant, Michigan State Police, Prevention Services
Bruce Calderwood, Program Director, Wildwood Ranch
Pamela McClain, Police Commander, Wayne County Sheriff's Department
Brenda Miliken, Program Director, Interim House of YMCA
Kim Miller, Council Member McPhail's Office
Kea Norrell-Aitch, Program Assoc. Project PEACE, Detroit Urban League
David A. Perkins, Referee, Detroit Juvenile Detention Center, 3rd Circuit Court
James Perlaki, Director of Outreach Program, The Common Ground Sanctuary

PRESENT (Cont'd.)

Carl Riggans, Oasis Youth Services
Jerry Shoate, Sergeant, Detroit Police Department
Ocie Tabb, III, Pastor, New Beginning Church
John Telford, Executive Director, Detroit Public Schools, Community Affairs
Wendi Tilman, Children's Svs. Coord., Women's Justice Center/My Sister's Place
Whitney Walton, Sergeant, Detroit Police Department
Willie White, Foundation and MIS Coord., Detroit Rescue Mission Ministries
Imani Williams, Ruth Ellis Center

Sharon McPhail called the meeting to order at 3:20 p.m. Council Member McPhail welcomed the participants to the first meeting of the Missing Children's Task Force. She explained that the issues surrounding missing children came to her attention when she first arrived at Council when a citizen experienced a missing child. Ms. McPhail stated that the crisis identified needed resources and procedures to assist Police Officers.

Council Member McPhail stated that the research indicates that 114,000 children were targets of attempted kidnaping by non family members last year, and of those 4,600 succeeded and were reported to law enforcement. Further, 127,000 children were actually thrown away by their parents or foster parents; 354,000 were abducted by family members, and 450,000 ran away. Ms. McPhail indicated that currently in America there are 438,000 children lost, injured or otherwise missing. She further explained that she did not have the exact figures for Michigan, but that it is obvious that a problem exists.

Council Member McPhail explained that the goal of the task force is to bring together resources to come up with a process and a protocol to deal with the situation. She referred to an outline of goals and objectives, but indicated that it is not the end all to anything. She indicated that the outline could be used as a framework for a model. She explained that everyone is welcome to make suggestions. Ms. McPhail stated that law enforcement is working hard but they lack the resources and a general process to deal with kidnaped children, in particular. She stated that law enforcement needs to be able to swing into action and do something within the first twenty-four hours, otherwise it could result in the child not being recovered.

Ms. McPhail explained that each participant was hand chosen because of their experience relative to the issue of missing children. She stressed an open membership policy and invited the participation of anyone wishing to contribute. Council Member McPhail reminded everyone that November is National Runaway Prevention Month.

Council Member McPhail requested the Reverend O.C. Tabb, III, to give an opening prayer and then to speak about his personal experience with this issue.

O.C. Tabb, III, the Pastor of New Beginning Church in Detroit stated that he is the father of seven children and that he was affected personally when his fifteen year-old daughter ran away from home earlier this year. Reverend Tabb stated the challenges in knowing that your child is out in the street nowhere to be found. He stated that the situation was reported immediately to the Police Department who in turn stated that they were doing everything within their power, however after days had gone by their efforts were of little comfort. Reverend Tabb shared his excitement about the formation of the task force. He additionally stated the importance of such a collaborative effort to stop situations of this type. He stated his belief that his daughter was harbored by an adult somewhere, but that the mechanism was not in place to address their needs. Reverend Tabb indicated that all the help he received was due to the involvement of his friend Council Member Sharon McPhail, and unfortunately not because he was O.C. Tabb, III, citizen of Detroit. The Reverend indicated that he was dissatisfied that, as a citizen, he was not given a means to reconcile the issues related to his situation. Reverend Tabb expressed his gratitude to Council Member McPhail for instituting the Missing Children's Task Force.

(Ms. McPhail requested a round of introductions to be made at this time. Council Member McPhail also recognized Council President Maryann Mahaffey.)

Ms. Mahaffey stated that she supported the mission of the task force. Council President Mahaffey further stated that she was looking forward to the results of the deliberations and the process of formulating the information on who the kids are and what the participants are able to do about the gaps and local government's participation in coordinating the process.

Calvin Hughes presented information about the e-mail address to be used by the task force. He explained that the e-mail address is not for reporting a missing child, but rather the main purpose is communicating task force business such as minutes, agendas, events, etc.

Ms. McPhail indicated her desire to work on the development of a shared protocol so that everyone is aware of the process. Ms. McPhail stated that if a child is reported missing or in the event of a kidnaping where there is evidence of an abduction then there should be a coordinated emergency response system that everybody has some part in. She said that in preparation of the first meeting her office staff shared several ideas, one involving a facsimile broadcast to every gas station. She explained that if someone grabs a kid by car they will need to stop for gas at some point along the way. She stated that development of a statewide response is necessary because Amber Alert is not used everywhere. Council Member McPhail indicated that the objective of the task force would be to put together a protocol or process for both kidnaped or emergency situations, as well as missing children for whatever reason they happen to be missing. Ms. McPhail reiterated that the goals and objectives are open to comment for improvements.

Ms. McPhail reviewed the following goals and objectives:

GOALS
- Raise community awareness of the problem: media partners
- Reduce kidnaping, missing and thrown away children
- Improve recovery rate in all categories: recover children
- Solve more cases/catch criminals: coordination of police and community
- Help victims cope: Clergy, mental health, and counselors

OBJECTIVES
- Coordination of existing resources
- Lobbying for changes/funds to support city/state/federal programs
- Prevention program
- Distribution of ID Kits
- Creation of reward fund
- Setting up grief management system
- Setting up Emergency Response System

Sean Dennedy recommended that parents utilize ADT fingerprint kits along with home records that can be given to local authorities in the case of a missing child. Mr. Dennedy stated that the kits are free and represent a pro-active measure that they hope to share with community groups around the nation as part of their Safe at Home program. Mr. Dennedy stated that an ADT contract is not necessary to obtain the kits.

Calvin Hughes resumed his overview of the Detroit Legislative Website stating that the City of Detroit web site contains various links. He stated that by clicking on the name of Sharon McPhail the task force site can be selected.

Mike Duggan reported that the County's Web Unit, in conjunction with the Sheriff's Department, spends a lot of time looking for missing children on the FIA list. He stated that recently two girls were located who had been engaging in prostitution after running away from their foster care homes. Prosecutor Duggan stated the girls were returned to their foster care homes but again ran away after eight hours. He stated that there is an apparent gap in the system because the only option currently in place to deal with these situations is a youth home which is no place to take runaways. He stressed the need for a distinction between an interim facility and a non-secure place where somebody can easily leave and a place where there are murderers locked up.

Maryann Mahaffey stated that runaways are described as status offenders, and jails and youth homes are not supposed to take status offenders.

Kay Farrow explained that status offenders, particularly girls, need a group home with a little more security and small enough to be intimate. Ms. Farrow added that this is especially true for girls because they generally run to boyfriends if he's not the abuser, or are out in the street being used for prostitution or have been victimized by other family members and they don't want to return home. Ms. Farrow stated that runaways are punished for using the good sense not to return to an unsafe home. Further, Ms. Farrow stated that these girls are prosecuted, locked up and returned to a home that is neglectful. Ms. Farrow added that it is a vicious cycle because there is nothing in the community to really address the need for safe houses. She stated that over 2,000 parent complaints are received a year about run away children and that the children usually return home. She said children don't run from homes that are meeting their needs. Ms. Farrow stressed the need for the provision of counseling to treat the cause of the problem once a safe environment is secured. She reiterated that these children are not locked up in group detention facilities because it is not appropriate.

Amy Good stated that Alternatives for Girls has three programs which are totally voluntary. Ms. Good stated that they house twelve women in their shelter, ages 16 to 20 who are homeless and are not involved in the foster care system and have no options. Ms. Good stated that due to limited space they currently must turn away a great number of women. She spoke about the street outreach program that reaches out to girls and young women out on the street. She stated that the stay is not limited to fourteen days and is very individualized. Ms. Good announced that the program would be moving into a new facility where they will eventually have room for up to 35 women including up to five with children.

Additionally, Ms. Good stressed that funding is critical in providing services which help move women toward independent living.

Sharon McPhail reiterated that a gap exists in the system for the provision of safe houses throughout the community where kids can go if they run away.

James Perlaki from Common Ground Sanctuary stated that the program accepts residents from Detroit and they have no geographic boundaries in their run away program which provides services for 10-17 year-old youth involved in status offenses. Mr. Perlaki said the program, which offers a nine bed shelter in the City of Royal Oak, is a two-week program but can be extended depending on the situation. Also, Mr. Perlaki stated that efforts are made to engage the family in counseling to try to reunite them.

Mr. Perlaki stated that Common Ground Sanctuary provides homeless youth services in three different program. He explained for the 17-21 year old, they offer a transitional living program with a seven bed facility, as well as a graduated apartment program for young people who have more skills to live on their own but don't have the means to obtain housing. He stated there was an outreach-based program linking Livingston, Macomb, Oakland, and portions of Wayne County in collaboration with other groups to work with young people to get them off the streets and into similar programs. Mr. Perlaki stated that he is the president of the Michigan Network for Youth and Families, a membership agency of thirty-eight programs serving runaway, homeless, and high risk youth throughout the State of Michigan.

Sekai Broaden reported that Safe Stay, a referral program in Western Wayne County where frustrated parents of ten year-old youth and younger could obtain referral services, recently lost its funding through Community Mental Health (CMH). She added that it is a wonderful program that is a needed resource in the community.

Leonard Dixon stated that he would like to see churches and schools work together with kids on a daily basis. He stated that most of the time these groups are aware of the problems that youth face. Mr. Dixon stated that the schools should become involved when children are reported missing because the initial concern is finding out who the kid hangs with and what's going on and then notifying the parents. Secondly, Mr. Dixon stated the churches could be a referral resource to oversee a certain section of the city for reporting problems within a particular area. Mr. Dixon stated that the problems will have to be fixed directly in the community where they start before becoming a police matter or anything else.

John Telford agreed that the schools' role could be broadened to support the efforts of the task force. Additionally, he stated that his office at Detroit Public Schools Community Affairs staffs sixteen Parent Community School Liaisons assigned throughout the city to deal with community issues. Mr. Telford stated that he will share additional information at the next meeting in order to connect them with the task force.

Kevin Jones (Detroit Police Department) recommended a social worker within the school who keeps account of student absenteeism with a three strikes you're out concept. He said the social worker could alert the family member about the absence and then notify the authorities if the child is determined to be missing. Mr. Jones stated that usually when children are missing from home they still attend school or hang out near the school.

Imani Williams (The Ruth Ellis Center) suggested that in serving the lesbian, gay, bi-sexual and trans-sexual community, the task force be mindful that most of the time gay youth are not in families or schools that are accepting of them resulting in verbal and emotional abuse. Ms. Williams stated that gays go from home to school (if they don't drop out) and to the streets. She suggested that the churches and others in collaboration with the task force should be gay affirming. She additionally pointed out that suicides are 50% higher for gay youth.

Willie White in responding to a question regarding homeless girls with children, stated that the Detroit Rescue Mission Ministries (DRMM) has a program called Teen Mom to include girls that are either pregnant or have a child, or are homeless and between the ages 13-17. Mr. White said DRMM will house these girls for up to two years but they must attend high school and parenting classes and eventually get a job. Mr. White stated that while FIA does a good job of referring a lot of girls to them sometimes the mission has to turn them down because they still have a guardian and even if they don't know where the guardian is they cannot accept them without a release. According to Mr. White, DRMM can house up to eight young women with eight children and will provide continuous support services to them.

Sharon McPhail directed the participants to review the form that was circulated earlier and requested that they select a committee or a sub-committee to participate on. Additionally, Ms. McPhail expressed her concerns about the practice or requirement, if any, to contact the parent or guardian when children seek out service organizations for sanctuary and whether this affects the trust relationship between the child and the organization.

Amy Good responded that it would depend upon how the mandatory reporting law is interpreted. Ms. Good stated that Alternatives for Girls interprets homeless minors as neglected and files Form 3200 to evidence child neglect. She stated, however, in order to keep the minor beyond 24 hours, the organization is required by the terms of their child care license to get written consent from the parent or guardian. She said that there is a process by which they must go through and there is little choice but to let the child know what they are doing. Ms. Good stated that the requirement often allows them an opportunity to establish a dialogue in order to steer the situation to reconciliation. Ms. Good said that if the parent refuses to cooperate then they are able to go through the court to get consent or in the alternative they must take the child to FIA if they are unable to help them.

Sharon McPhail stated that there may be a need to propose legislation on the reporting issues that were expressed.

Greg Jones, Sergeant, State Police, shared his understanding that a licensed organization would fall under the Child Protection Law which dictates that they report and since the minor would be left to live on the streets otherwise that would fall under the neglect statute. Sgt. Jones further stated that the organization would be required to report that status to FIA by filling out Form 3200 and that would result in a law enforcement response.

Sharon McPhail stated that unless the situation rises to a level of abuse then it would not be an issue for the Prosecutor's Office.

Mike Duggan responded that abuse cases are handled by the Prosecutor's Office, but neglect cases are not. He stated that if mandatory reporters do not report then that is something that would be taken very seriously.

Sharon McPhail inquired about the protocol used when authorities have confirmed information that a child has been snatched or dragged into a van or otherwise kidnaped.

Sergeant Jones stated that law enforcement would naturally respond when they receive information that a child has been kidnaped. He said that there has to be a call to law enforcement whether it be by 911 dispatch or by local law enforcement which would then result in the responding agency completing a preliminary investigation. He identified statewide programs in Michigan such as Amber Alert which can be activated upon the report of an endangered missing child, as well as the Eagle Eye Child Net Program wherein a photograph is distributed to local postal carriers allowing them to look for the child on their route. He said the Eagle Eye Child Net Program is in partnership with the United States Postal Service.

Sergeant Jones additionally stated that local agencies can send a fax form to them so that they can distribute it to broadcasters who will interrupt their programming to broadcast that information. He said there is also a locator system sponsored by the National Center for the Missing and Exploited Children which allows the law enforcement agency to create an electronic flyer of the child and disseminate important information to other law enforcement agencies throughout the country. Mr. Jones stated that the State Police is trying to establish two locator systems in each district, including Detroit, throughout the state.

Sergeant Jones additionally reported that the protocol for placing information on the Changing Message Signs (CMS) in the Detroit area was recently finalized regarding Amber Alert. He reiterated that a photograph is required for most of the programs mentioned. He said that oftentimes they don't have a valid description of the child or don't know what the child was wearing, or have only a photo image of a child playing in a playground. He stressed that in order for them to disseminate a photo of the child they need something of the face and shoulders. In closing, he said that when law enforcement does respond they must undoubtedly complete the preliminary investigation first as stated by law and then if they want to activate the other systems they can if a photo is available. Mr. Jones said that the Detroit Police Department and other jurisdictions have an established protocol for missing child investigations and they just have to adhere to it.

Lieut. James Elliot, Detroit Police Department, stated that after the responding officer takes the initial pre-report, they respond by sending out a team of Detectives. Lieutenant Elliot stated that the parents are then contacted to secure a useable photograph and if the child meets the requirement of being an endangered child under seventeen, DPD prepares the Amber Alert form and contact the State Police to get the photo broadcast. Further, the Lieutenant stated that the information is disseminated though the communications center to all mobile scout cars. Lieutenant Elliot said that the Detroit Police Department will follow up using available resources such as Amber Alert, National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, and the Wayne County Sheriff's Department until the child is recovered.

Sharon McPhail asked Lieutenant Elliot what type of resources could they use that are not currently in use, and specifically how much time does it take to enact available resources.

Lieut. Elliot stated that if a person were to call dispatch right now and say their child just got snatched from in front of the house, it would take five minutes before the run is dispatched and given to the first available scout car who would arrive to take the initial information and then contact the Detectives in the Armed Robbery Unit which would take another 10 or 15 minutes. Lieut. Elliot said that once the required parental authorization is secured and the required people have been notified, they can get the photograph to the State

Police to put out an electronic flyer. Lieutenant Elliot stated it would take two hours roughly to enact their available resources.

Sgt. Greg Jones expressed that there are very specific protocol set by the Federal Highway Safety Commission and that once that becomes fully established it will require testing. Sergeant Jones stated that when Amber Alert is activated on the CMS there has to be substantially reliable vehicle information without which they cannot use the system. He also said that the message can be pre-empted by whatever hazardous driving conditions may exist.

Sharon McPhail stated that under the Parent and Child Education area, people will need to be educated on how to properly observe. She explained that frequently people don't know what to look for so that they can use the system effectively. She further explained that people need to know that adequate vehicle information is required. She said that although it sounds like a simple thing it's not common knowledge to look for license plate numbers.

Sergeant Jones said that the best prevention is a caring and nurturing adult which cannot be taught to people, but what can be taught is the use of child identification kits. He went on to reiterate that a photograph of the face and shoulders is the best information. He said that fingerprints are wonderful but DNA is better. He said there are many DNA kits on the market. He suggested that the information be kept at home by the parents and should not result in any cost to them. He stated that another simple tool used by the State Police is bite-ware impressions that can be taken from styrofoam pads to get the bite mark impressions of children. He suggested keeping the bite-ware impressions along with DNA and information on physical traits and the child I.D. kits to be used by law enforcement.

Wendy Tillman requested information relevant to education of children concerning abductions committed by non-custodial parents.

Sergeant Jones stated that the State Police has a teaching, educating and mentoring program currently in schools. He said that the program teaches children in grades K-12 how to be safe and focuses on issues like how to get out of uncomfortable situations. He said that the program does not focus on stranger danger because danger is not limited to strangers. Additionally, he stated that over three hundred officers have been trained in this program outside of the State Police. Sergeant Jones stated that two new modules are being added this year to include internet safety and domestic relations. He explained that an increase in child predators has necessitated the need for internet safety education for teens.

Escape School Representative stated that there is an existing program within the Detroit Public Schools that teaches children techniques on how to prevent being snatched.

Sharon McPhail suggested the State Police and the Escape School prepare a presentation on the information covered for the next meeting of the task force. Council Member McPhail stated that the task force meeting is being televised and that presentations are welcomed if pre-arrangements are made with her office. Ms. McPhail stated that her office received a video about Escape School which will be shown after the meeting.

Council Member McPhail stated that future meetings of the Missing Children's Task Force will be no more than ninety minutes in duration. She extended a commitment that meetings will be scheduled as needed and will be productive.

Tara Dunlap of the Detroit Police Department stated that they recently dealt with a kidnaping victim for whom there were no available photographs. She stated that the school system should start capturing student pictures onto a database which would enable the police to have access to the information quicker. She stressed that the available technology is not being used to it's fullest potential.

Carl Riggans (Oasis Youth Services) stated that most abductions usually occur when kids are on their way home from school or after-school programs. He stated that education is needed to teach kids how to identify the correct route home. He also stressed that police presence is needed around schools and recreation centers to coincide with the time that kids are being let out.

Billy Christian (Children's Aid Society) stated that her organization also focuses on prevention services. She stated that a re-focus is needed to link and coordinate realistic services within schools, churches and recreation centers. Ms. Christian stated that children need to know where the safe places are directly within their communities. Also, she stated that children need somewhere to go where they won't be turned away because they don't meet someone's criteria.

Sharon McPhail agreed that the objective of the task force was to put together all existing information into a publication that can be provided to everyone to identify these places.

Whitney Walton of the Detroit Police Department suggested that a representative of the U.S. Customs for the Detroit Border be invited to attend a future task force meeting.

Sharon McPhail agreed that such a distinction should be made.

Ms. McPhail thanked all the participants from the various agencies. Ms. McPhail advised that the next meeting would be announced at a later date.

Ms. McPhail then adjourned the meeting at 4:30 p.m.

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Minutes Prepared By: Ronnette Williams-Starling
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