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GOVERNOR'S TASK FORCE ON MISSING CHILDREN

FINAL REPORT

MARCH 12, 1991

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INTRODUCTION

In July 1990, then Governor Rudy Perpich commissioned 27 Minnesota citizens as members of a Task Force on Missing Children. It was formed in direct response to the kidnapping of Jacob Wetterling with the ultimate goal of benefiting all missing children. They were charged to deal with issues related to Minnesota children who are, were, or potentially could be missing from their homes. By February 15, this Task Force was to draft recommendations and present them to the Governor in the form of a report.

The Task Force members selected represent a variety of agencies and perspectives and collectively brought a broad base of knowledge to the task. Task Force members represent human service agencies, education, law enforcement, social service agencies, special projects which deal with missing youth, criminal justice, the arts, the religious community, parents with missing children and concerned citizens. Names and addresses are included in this report.

Due to the diversity of issues, the Task Force formed into 5 subcommittees. The topics they dealt with were non-family abduction, parental abduction, runaways and throwaways, public education/information and system needs. Each subcommittee was instructed to set forth two (2) recommendations which would be brought to the committee at large and subsequently become a part of the report to the Governor.

The categories of children addressed within the responsibility of this committee and the issues of such magnitude that each committee found it impossible to stay within the guidelines of two (2) recommendations. Each committee, therefore, selected those recommendations which have the potential for preventing children from becoming victims and which deal with the issues involved when children are reported missing.

These subcommittee recommendations comprise the major body of this report. Each subcommittee's recommendations are those of the members of the committee listed within that report. The content of each report was presented to the Task Force at large and is acknowledged as addressing the major issues within that subcommittee's area of responsibility.

NON-FAMILY MEMBER ABDUCTION SUB-COMMITTEE

According to a study conducted in mid-1990 by Dr. Gunnar Stickler, an emeritus pediatrician with the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, when asked "What are the greatest perceived risks of parents regarding their children?" - 72% responded with the fear that their child will be kidnapped by a stranger. Although this is the smallest portion of "missing" children, it is the most threatening to the child and the most feared by the parent.

Our subcommittee looked at different states' legislative changes and conclusions of their studies, at the Selected State Legislation Guide Book from the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children at the National Incidence Study of Missing, Abducted, Runaway, and Throwaway Children (NISMART) and realized that although we hear about abductions only occasionally in Minnesota, every region of the country is experiencing the same thing. This is a major national problem that is, in large part, going unsolved.

Our subcommittee learned citizens are concerned and outraged about the abduction of Jacob Wetterling, but there is a great need to pay attention to the less publicized, far more frequent sexual violations against children. There are a very large number of "stranger" abductions that are short term and involve taking children for the purpose of sexual molestation or victimization. The legal definition of Non-Family Abduction used in the NISMART Summary meant:

"the coerced and unauthorized taking of a child into a building, a vehicle, or a distance of more than 20 feet; the detention of a child for a period of more than an hour; or the luring of a child for the purposes of committing another crime."

While Minnesota statute does not specifically define non-family abduction, it is included within statute 609.25; subdivision 1. Acts Constituting, which states:

Whoever, for any of the following purposes, confines or removes from one place to another, any person without the person's consent or, if the person is under the age of 16 years, without the consent of the person's parents or other legal custodian is guilty of kidnapping and may be sentenced as provided in subdivision 2:

- (1) To hold for ransom or reward for release,

- or as shield or hostage; or
- (2) To facilitate commission of any felony or flight thereafter, or
- (3) To commit great bodily harm or to terrorize the victim or another; or
- (4) To hold in involuntary servitude.

And in 609.25; Subdivision 2. Sentence, which states:

Whoever violates subdivision 1 may be sentenced as follows:

- (1) If the victim is released in a safe place without great bodily harm, to imprisonment for not more than 20 years or to payment of a fine of not more than \$35,000, or both; or
- (2) If the victim is not released in a safe place or if the victim suffers great bodily harm during the course of the kidnapping to imprisonment for not more than 40 years or to payment of a fine of not more than \$50,000, or both.

When a child is abducted, molested and released, which is usually the case, it is often recorded as a molestation, although the crime is based on the abduction. Research from the Kevin Collins Foundation shows that it's child molesters who abduct children. The NISMART Summary states that two-thirds or more of abductions which met the legal definition involved sexual assault and over 85 percent involved force. Most child molesters were themselves victims of the same sort of treatment. However, it must be noted that not all molested children become child molesters. Growing up, molesters often started by fondling children in or around the family. The U.S. Advisory Board on Child Abuse and Neglect reported in June, 1990 that there were 900,000 substantiated cases of child abuse and neglect in 1989. The majority of these crimes were reportedly perpetrated against these children by members of their own households.

Research has demonstrated that sex offenders are repetitive and compulsive. Research also demonstrates that child sex offenders will continue their abuses for years and rarely are "cured." The primary goal of treatment focuses on teaching offenders to control their impulses.

Studies show we need to break the cycle of child molesting. This has to start by acknowledging how big the problem is. We all agree that it's never O.K. to molest a child - not your own, not your neighbor's, not any child.

According to the 1988 NISMART Executive Summary, abductions by non-family members reported to police ranged as high as 4,600

per year, with many more unreported, and 114,600 children reported abduction attempts which were successfully thwarted. The FBI Journal states that "like rape, child molestation is one of the most under reported crimes, and virtually every study...acknowledged that only 1 to 10 percent of the incidents are ever disclosed."

Most abductions are short term. The child is most often molested then released. Often the family feels shame (though undeserved) and believes the child has suffered enough, hence, does not report the crime. It is critical that efforts toward elevating public awareness are increased, informing people of the importance of reporting instances of child molestation and or abduction. Our subcommittee's recommendations began to focus on a centralized system of reporting this information and tracking the child molester.

Ernie Allen from the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children points to California as having a good model for registration of sex offenders. We met with Senate Counsel to see how we can most effectively adapt their system in Minnesota. The main change we would propose is the establishment of a violent crime center. This center would expand on existing Bureau of Criminal Apprehension (BCA) efforts and would contain an investigative support unit and a system to facilitate the identification and apprehension of persons responsible for murder, kidnap, including parental abduction, false imprisonment or sexual assault.

Sex offenders typically have a high rate of recidivism. For investigatory and safety reasons, law enforcement agencies must know where sex offenders reside. Currently in Minnesota, "When the sex offender is discharged from supervised release or probation, the probation officer shall inform all law enforcement agencies notified under this section. Every agency shall then destroy the data." (Section 243.165 NOTICE OF SEX OFFENDERS ADDRESS Subd. 3.)

Our subcommittee would like to see mandatory treatment for sex offenders. Since sex offenders are routinely returned back to the streets, treatment may provide them with the opportunity to change their behavior. Treatment, especially in the case of the young offender, may play a useful role in attempts to break the cycle of child molesting. One fact cannot be ignored; the problem of child physical and sexual abuse is costing our country. 90% of convicted felons, 75% of adolescent prostitutes and 70% of adolescent drug users report that they were victims of physical and/or sexual abuse as children.

There is a need for additional study regarding record checks on students who are new to a school district. This study should investigate the feasibility of checking for proper

identification, as well as verification that new students are with their proper parent or guardian. It would also be fairly simple to flag the school records of a child who is currently, or was previously, enrolled upon notification that a child has been reported missing.

There is a need to develop programs which seek offender resources to pay for counseling and treatment for children who are victims of sexual abuse and exploitation.

Upon pulling together many resources for this Governor's Task Force, our subcommittee quickly became aware of many complications in seeking solutions. Our children could benefit from further study into the dangers facing them today. We recognize the need for public education and awareness about the very large problem of child molestation and exploitation. These programs often trigger children to report their own stories of victimization. All children are at risk of being sexually molested, assaulted or abducted. Minnesota legislators must pay attention to the loud voices calling for change in priorities with regard to our children. These recommendations will create a safer world for all our children.

When asked about child molesting, pornography and prostitution, a law enforcement official said, "The only way not to find this problem in your community is to not look." Statistics show that for Jacob and all the other children at risk, we can no longer afford to look the other way.

SUBCOMMITTEE MEMBERS: Patty Wetterling, Chair; David Baraga, St. Sen. Joe Bertram, Sr., Marcia Cummings, Kim Frank, Sheriff Jim Kostraba, Marc McMullen, Rosanna Walker

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Registration of convicted sex offenders.
2. Establishment of a Violent Crime Center.
3. Time limit of 4 hours in which law enforcement agencies submit their reports to the Violent Crime Center.
4. The BCA should provide training about the use of the Violent Crime Center to appropriate agencies.
5. Change the sentencing guidelines so that there is imprisonment after 2 convictions of 2nd degree sexual assault instead of 3 convictions.
6. Mandatory treatment for sex offenders.

FURTHER STUDY IS NEEDED IN THE FOLLOWING AREAS:

1. Checking school records and flagging students.

2. "Child Victim's Bill of Rights" as suggested by the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children.
3. The disproportionate victimization of disadvantaged youth.
4. Pornography Issues

SOURCES

- 1) National Incidence Study of Missing, Abducted, Runaway, and Throwaway Children (NISMAART)
- 2) "Help Us Find Abducted Children" The Kevin Collins Foundation 1990
- 3) "Help Us Find Abducted Children."
- 4) "An abducted child tells how he could have been found" The Kevin Collins Foundation
- 5) Project Charlie's Safe Program - A program of Storefront Youth Action, Edina, Minnesota 1989
- 6) Keynote address Transcript - Ernest E. Allen, President The National Center Missing and Exploited Children November 10, 1990 - St. Cloud Civic Center
- 7) Task Force on Community Protection - Final Report to Booth Gardner, Governor State of Washington
- 8) Task Force on Community Protection
- 9) Project Charlie's Safe Program - A program of Storefront Youth Action, Edina, Minnesota, 1989
- 10) Project Charlie's Safe Program

PARENTAL ABDUCTION

Each year an estimated 354,000 children are abducted by one parent from the custody of the other parent. In the typical child kidnapping case, a noncustodial parent abducts the child from the custodial parent, often with the aid of relatives. Informal surveys have suggested that abducting parents are emotionally unstable at the time of the abduction. These parents also demonstrate a history of violent or abusive behavior, having abused their spouse or children in the past. Thus, an abduction places the entire family in a situation which, short of the death or life threatening illness of a child, is among the most disruptive of family events.

For the child, "life on the run" can become a constant refrain of moving from one location to the next, avoiding close ties with anyone and being fed distortions about the other parent. According to data from Missing Children Minnesota, many child victims who have been recovered were physically, sexually and/or emotionally abused while in hiding.

Minnesota Statute 609.26 makes parental kidnapping, including both child abduction and concealment, a felony. The statute also provides that, at the discretion of the court, the cost of returning the child to the custodial parent may be allocated to the abductor. It allows as a defense that the abducting parent or concealer reasonably believes the child to be in physical danger while in the custody of the other parent.

While the law provides a criminal penalty for parental abduction, the speedy return of the child is more likely to be affected by the right of the custodial parent to pursue a civil cause of action. This would allow the parent who has the right of custody, control and services of a child to maintain an action for damages against ANYONE who actually or allegedly assisted the noncustodial parent in abducting or concealing a child (or children) from the custodial parent.

Since the sooner an ambitious search is begun, the better the chances of recovery, it is important that statute provide for a speedy search. The current language in the statute says that a child may be missing for fourteen (14) days before a search is begun, many law enforcement agencies will not seriously become involved in a parental abduction case for two (2) weeks. This time needs to be shortened to affect the return of children to their custodial parent.

The defense that is currently available to the abducting

parent provides them with the opportunity to exploit the system. A requirement needs to be added so that the abducting parent has, on file, a statement that they have reason to be concerned for the safety of the child (or children) while they are in the care of the custodial parent.

Subcommittee members: Marge Romero, Chair; Carol Watson, Colleen Lloyd.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Right of the custodial parent to take civil action against anyone who abducts, conceals or assists in the abduction or concealment of the child (or children).
2. Change "14 day" language, as length of time before search must be instigated, in Statute 609.26 to three (3) days.
3. Require abducting parent to have on record with a child protection agency that he/she believes child is in physical danger in care of custodial parent if he/she is going to use a portion of this statute as a defense.
4. Statewide law enforcement agencies treat parental abduction cases as the felony crimes that they are and that county attorneys prosecute the cases.

RUNAWAY AND/OR THROWAWAY CHILDREN

A child runs away from home every twenty six seconds in the United States. Research compiled by the U.S. Department of Justice Studies estimates that there are at least 700,000 to 1,000,000 runaway and/or throwaway children in America, half of which go unreported to authorities. The Minnesota Department of Human Services reports Minnesota ranks fourth in the nation as having the most homeless youth. Its estimate is that there are up to 1,000 runaway and/or throwaway children on the street of Minneapolis and St. Paul on any given night. Youth workers and numerous studies report that in a majority of cases, family conflict or violence precipitated a youth's decision to run away from home.

Although studies reviewed indicate that Minnesota has funded crisis intervention efforts in the past, early intervention efforts that could have prevented a major part of this problem are virtually non-existent and those that are attempted are inadequate and, often, inappropriate. It is important that the legislature make isolating and treating the causal factors of runaway and/or throwaway youth a priority, if these children are to become productive, functional members of our future society.

Throwaway children are defined as those who:

- 1) are asked to leave home;
- 2) leave and are told not to return home;
- 3) after they leave are not looked for by parents or guardians;
- 4) are deserted or abandoned.

There are approximately 127,000 throwaway children nationwide, according to estimates by the Department of Justice. While throwaways consist predominately of older teens from low-income families, a disproportionate number of those who are deserted or abandoned throughout the U.S. are under age four (4). Professionals within the Task Force related these findings are also reflective of the current situation in Minnesota.

From January to September 1990, 7,604 children were entered in the Minnesota Crime Information System (MINCIS) as runaway youth. Those missing under suspicious circumstances, lost, throwaway, suspected victims of child abuse, sexual abuse or parental abduction cases are not classified, as such. Total

numbers of runaway cases not cleared by cancellation, voluntary return, arrest or for other reasons as of September 1990, in MINCIS, is 2,725. 1,627 of these youths have not been heard from in over one year.

While it is generally accepted that runaways are disadvantaged youth, workers with Project Offstreets report that the children they serve are from all racial, ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds. However, a large number of these youths come from stepparent families or have run away from system or institutional care such as foster homes, shelters or group homes. In comparison to runaways, throwaways report experiencing a higher degree of family conflict and have been victims of, or witness to, more violence in their home environment.

Studies of the lives of abusers, report that at least one third of them have been physically and sexually abused as children. Many others suffer from neglect throughout their early lives. Society has not treated these children well, with commonly held beliefs that the child's own actions brought on the situation, that they came from bad families or that they themselves were willful, bad children. If the children are of color, they are held in even less regard by society.

All children must get the message that they have a right to live free from abuse and that there are people who will provide them with help, if they will ask for it. The serious core issues of abuse and neglect experienced by throwaways and/or runaways will have long term implications not only for these children but, if not dealt with, will have a far reaching, extensive impact on society.

Public education needs to sensitize society to the plight of runaway/throwaway youth. These messages need to be stated in clear, concise language on topics such as child abuse and neglect, alcoholism, effective parenting, and discipline. This should include educational policy at the district level and provide age appropriate information about physical, sexual and mental abuse to students. Teachers and other staff members would need to be trained in child abuse prevention curriculum and updated on reporting laws.

There need to be disincentives to those who take advantage of runaway and throwaway youth and a variety of services available for youth who are in crisis. This involves increasing the penalty under current Criminal Code 609.322, Subdivision, Solicitation Inducement and Promotion of Prostitution, Individuals Aged 16-18 from a five (5) year felony to a ten (10) year felony. Law enforcement policy on the investigation of reported runaways/throwaways needs to be standardized statewide and federal legislators should be lobbied to introduce legislation mandating uniformity in laws pertaining to these

children.

Providing a resolution to the problem of runaways and throwaways involves intervention at the preventative (to keep situations from occurring), secondary (to keep current situations from recurring), and tertiary (to intervene to resolve the situation).

Subcommittee Members: Colleen Lloyd, Chair; Pat Gharrity, Tom Gray, Don LeTourneau, Ed McBrayer, Marge Romero.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1) Develop a massive public education campaign emphasizing helping, saving and protecting our children.
- 2) Change Minnesota Criminal Code 609.322, subdivision 2,
"Solicitation Inducement and Promotion of Prostitution,
Individuals Aged 16-18..."
to increase penalty to a 10 year felony.
- 3) Formalize policy at the district level to teach age appropriate, non-threatening material about physical, sexual and mental abuse, communication and family living skills and chemical dependency with training for educators in child abuse prevention.
- 4) Develop a 24 hour hotline for youth in crisis to call for counseling and resources.
- 5) Standardize law enforcement policy on the investigation of cases of runaways/throwaways with emphasis on increased interaction between law enforcement and social service agencies.
- 6) Differentiate problems of runaways and throwaways from those of other missing child in policy, research and publications throughout the state.
- 7) Focus on the problem of children who run from institutions and other forms of system care, since they are among the most chronic of runaways and at the highest risk of becoming crime victims and/or crime perpetrators.
- 8) Develop an interdisciplinary approach between the agencies identifying, intervening and treating the

problems of families of throwaways and runaways.

- 9) Establish group home settings for high-risk youth, such as minor AFDC recipients and adolescent prostitutes, and specialized therapeutic foster homes for runaway and throwaway youth.
- 10) Authorize funding to provide family intervention services for agencies with programs designed to encourage usage by runaway and throwaway youth and to providers of shelter, food, counseling, medical screening and care, vocational and educational programs to runaway/throwaway youth.
- 11) Provide incentives for long term stabilization planning for family reunification or independent living for youth who are runaways and throwaways.

PUBLIC EDUCATION/INFORMATION

There are a variety of issues involved in educating and informing the public concerning missing children. These involved fiscal resources, prevention curriculum, the opposition to curriculum, ownership of the problem, society's concern for the welfare of all children, family life education, living skills education, communication between prevention programs, citizenship and self esteem.

Most success will result from providing strong prevention programs which present balanced information and promote empowerment and self esteem. These programs will be available to children, educators, parents and community members. School based programs which involve the community in their efforts, particularly parents and members of religious communities, should be encouraged. An example of one such program is the Maxine Waters Child Abuse Prevention Training Act of California. Public service announcements should elevate public awareness of the missing children problem and the prevention efforts that are successful.

The goal of prevention programs should be to keep offenses from occurring and recurring by working with potential and actual victims as well as potential and actual offenders. Minnesota currently has a variety of programs which have had varying degrees of success. Programs which have proven their success should be strengthened and expanded, such as the Children's Trust Fund.

The Governor should appoint a permanent task force to identify community-based groups involved in prevention and network them with other groups. This group should also investigate funding sources and provide this information to the prevention groups.

Subcommittee Members: Nancy Riestenberg, Chair; Dianne Brisson, Janis Fuller, Denise Revels-Robinson, John Yackel.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1) Strengthen and expand the Children's Trust Fund by increasing funding to maintain and support current programs and services. Funding could also be used to develop and expand these services
- 2) Expand current prevention/education efforts (e.g. public service announcements) that include a focus on state and local services currently available.
- 3) Encourage the development of public service announcements concerning missing children which would also include and address societal and cultural attitudes regarding children and violence.
- 4) Promote and fund school curricula, public service announcements, etc., that advocate alternative parental disciplinary behavior in general and specific non-violent parenting skills.
- 5) Establish prevention/education programs in schools where none exist and assist with the development of training tools and materials.
- 6) Support and encourage the dissemination of related information through existing resources (e.g. radio, newspapers, television) which serve communities of color using language and culturally appropriate materials.
- 7) Disseminate information on missing and exploited children to all existing programs and encourage them to incorporate this information as part of their ongoing educational efforts.
- 8) Establish a permanent Task Force to identify, network and coordinate community-based prevention groups and assist them in finding resources to extend their efforts. The Children's Trust Fund could be expanded to fulfill this need as could the Minnesota Missing Children's Center (see recommendation #3).

SYSTEM NEEDS

Since the members of the Task Force came from diversified backgrounds and had been involved in the problems associated with missing children both personally and professionally for many years, the system(s) needs became identified through their collective experiences. These individuals related that calling attention to the extent of the problem; educating the public, including specific training for various targeted agencies and individuals; and impacting the services provided by the BCA are ways in which the system can be impacted.

The greatest impact upon systems, initially, would be through educating the public and agency personnel. Task Force members related that at present there is little done by most agencies to train their personnel in dealing with issues related to missing children. Even those agencies providing services to children and their families on a daily basis have no training sessions. In many agencies, the basic information on prevention strategies, sensitivity to families needs, differentiation between categories of missing children, and other issues is not presented effectively or, in many cases, is not presented at all.

There is a need for information and training for all personnel involved in any aspect of missing children, including those who come in contact with young children on a regular basis (preventive), those who search for and/or work with targeted (at risk) or runaway/throwaway youth (secondary), and those who deal with the many problems of missing children and their families (tertiary), as well as parents and community members. This information should be broad based to encompass the varied problems and issues involved in the overall category of missing children.

Key agencies to target would be law enforcement, education, criminal justice and social services. The training for law enforcement should be a part of the 48 hours which each law enforcement officer is required to take every three years. School personnel should receive training in how to handle situations when a child says he/she is not with his/her "right" parent, demonstrates evidence of abuse, or in subtle ways asks for help. This will require information on the law and legal and personal responsibility.

Information should be provided to criminal justice system personnel on personal issues and problems related to child abduction and missing children. Those providing services to individuals and families, such as social workers, doctors,

psychologists and counselors, should be trained to recognize the problems of families going through the trauma of searching for their child and the aftermath of the child's return.

Except for children taken by strangers, little attention is focused on other kind of missing children. Strategies must be developed and employed that will continue to keep the public aware of the many categories of missing children and the problems realized by those missing youth and their families. Agency personnel must also receive updated information on a regular basis. They, in turn, should be required to pass on this information to those they serve, namely parents and children.

A coordination of services, including training and educational programs, and the identification of resources, with locations and the way to access them, will ensure that services are accessed by those who need them. This must be the responsibility of an agency and specific individuals within that agency. To widely distribute this information, a directory of services and regular publications by the coordinating agency should be developed. Other methods for presenting information, such as Public Service Announcements (PSAs), newspaper articles and ads, and billboards could be developed and coordinated by this agency. Since accurate statistics are not currently available, mandatory reporting by all law enforcement agencies should be required. Compilation of this data could be another function of the coordinating agency.

The Governor should declare one week in 1991 Missing Children's Week. During that week one day should be set aside for a resource fair at the Capitol. The Governor should also send message to law enforcement agencies to be read at roll calls during that week. As the kick-off to the week, he could hold a news conference informing the public about the issues and the activities that will occur during that week.

One of the problems with identifying missing children is that while physical descriptions of them are currently listed within the BCA data base, information on them can only be accessed through their birthdate, real name or social security number. The difficulty in obtaining this information, particularly on young children who do not know these things about themselves, means it could take weeks to check out a report on a potentially abducted child. By then he or she may no longer be in the area of the sighting. Expanding the BCA data base to be accessed by physical descriptions would assist in the searching and retrieving of information which will enable agencies to find these children sooner.

Subcommittee Members: Carol Watson, Chair; Dixie Waller Anderson, Donna Anderson, Nancy Hite, Christine Koch, Sue Pagnac, Sr., Marge Romero

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1) A Missing Children's Awareness Week should be declared in 1991, which will include a residence fair, PSA campaign, readings of information during law enforcement roll call, and a variety of coordinated activities statewide.
- 2) Law Enforcement Officers' recertification training should require that eight (8) hours, out of the required 48 hours every three years, be in the area of victims' rights and child victim issues.
- 3) Two (2) new positions be created at the Minnesota Missing Children Clearinghouse at the BCA; (1) a coordinator for training and educational programs and (2) a victim services advocate and resources coordinator, who would also be in charge of publishing a quarterly bulletin.
- 4) Files within the BCA database should be accessible by physical description of the child.

SUMMARY

This report from the Task force on Missing Children conclusively shows the need for immediate action in a range of areas in order to begin the process of addressing issues regarding missing children. After nine months of research, it became very clear to Task Force members that even if all recommendations in this report were to be adopted, that progress, while significant, would still be only the first steps necessary in coming to grips with the problems we and our children now face.

The Task Force identified five key areas related to the missing children problem. The categories include non-family abduction, parental abduction, runaway and throwaway children, public information and education, and system needs. Subcommittees studied each of these areas in producing a report and recommendations. The recommendations, in no particular order of priority, include:

- > registration of, and mandatory treatment for, convicted sex offenders.
- > establishing a Violent Crime Center.
- > granting custodial parents the right to take civil action against anyone who abducts or assists in the abduction of their children.
- > require law enforcement agencies to begin an immediate search when a child is reported missing.
- > step up investigative and prosecutorial efforts in parental abduction cases to reflect the crime's felony status.
- > develop a massive public education campaign to prevent parental abuse which is a major factor in cases of runaway and throwaway children.
- > increase criminal penalties for inducing 16-to-18-year-olds involvement in prostitution.
- > strengthen and expand the Children's Trust Fund.
- > establish prevention education programs in schools.
- > institute a Missing Children's Awareness Week.
- > require law enforcement recertification training programs dedicate time to the study of victims' rights and child victim issues.
- > files on missing children within the Bureau of Criminal Apprehension must become accessible by the physical description of the child.

In addition, the Task Force identified but was unable to

address another area of major concern. In researching other areas, it became very apparent that communities of color have their own unique problems regarding missing children. The Task Force believes these communities are an under-served population that would immensely benefit from specific culturally sensitive programs and urges further action in this area.

The Task Force stresses that this Report is not a definitive work, rather it is a first attempt to address the most serious and identifiable aspects of the missing children dilemma. In fact, there is a general consensus among Task Force members that some sort of permanent, on-going commission be created to continue critical work in this area. There is much that remains to be done.

<u>Name and Title</u>	<u>Address</u>	<u>Telephone #</u>
Edward McBrayer Director	1637 Hennepin Avenue Minneapolis, MN 55403	338-3103
Marc McMullen	17920 Tamarack St. N.W. Andover, MN 55304	434-7169
Rosanna Walker Pastor	265 - 8th Ave. Granite Falls, MN 56241	564-4991
Dixie Waller Anderson	3335 W. St. Germain St. Cloud, MN 56301	218-829-5901
Donna J. Anderson Crime Victim Ombudsman	Crime Victim & Witness Adv. Council N 465 Griggs Midway Bldg. 1821 University Ave. St. Paul, MN 55104	642-0397
Marcia Cummings	Bureau of Criminal Apprehension State Clearinghouse 1246 University Ave. St. Paul, MN 55104	642-0610
Linda S. Finney	Bureau of Criminal Apprehension State Clearinghouse 1246 University Ave. St. Paul, MN 55104	642-0610
Dianne Brisson	1949 Wilson Ave., #115 St. Paul, MN 55119	735-1336
Janis L. Fuller	1270 Lincoln Ave. St. Paul, MN 55105	698-6256
Colleen Lloyd Dispatcher	Minneapolis Police & Fire B911 City Hall Minneapolis, MN	348-2821
	Home: 1499 - 10th Ave. Newport, MN 55055	459-6137
John Yackel	20 E. Golden Lake Rd. Circle Pines, MN 55014	W-786-4343 H-784-5177
Marge Romero	Missing Children Minnesota 1348 Hampshire Ave. S. St. Louis Park, MN 55426	W-296-4274 H-541-1504
Carol Watson	Missing Children Minnesota 2951 Aldrich N. Minneapolis, MN 55411	W-521-1188 H-522-4549
Pat Gharrity	3817 Blaisdell Ave. S. Minneapolis, MN 55419	W-456-9446 H-861-5144

<u>Name and Title</u>	<u>Address</u>	<u>Telephone #</u>
Susan C. Pagnac Sr.	9792 Hemlock Ln. Maple Grove, MN 55369-3666	424-5645
Don LeTourneau	2311 Bryant Ave. S., #2 Minneapolis, MN 55405	374-9027
Tom Gray	3759 Washburn Ave. N. Minneapolis, MN 55412	296-4322
Dan Broughton	Work: Mayo Clinic Dept. of Pediatrics Rochester, MN 55905 Home: 943 - 10th St. S.W. Rochester, MN 55902	507-284-5247 507-282-2644
Denise Revels Robinson	Dept. of Human Services 444 Lafayette Rd. St. Paul, MN 55155-3832	296-5288
Christine Koch	Minn. Women's Political Caucus 1152 Sylvan Dale Rd. Mendota Heights, MN 55118	W-487-3275 W-646-9474 H-451-9508
Nancy Hite Executive Director	Mpls. Youth Diversion Program 1905 - 3rd Ave. S. Minneapolis, MN 55404	871-3613
Cordelia Anderson Director, Prev. Prog.	Illusion Theater 528 Hennepin Ave., #704 Minneapolis, MN 55403	339-4944
Nancy Riestenberg	Illusion Theater 528 Hennepin Ave., #704 Minneapolis, MN 55403	339-4944
Eleanor Kragseth	4548 Ewing Ave. N. Minneapolis, MN 55422	535-2226
Kimberly Frank	11105 - 191st Ave. N.W. Elk River, MN 55330	441-1383
Bob Arnold	555 Park St. St. Paul, MN 55103	227-7209
David Baraga	33919 - 91st Ave. N. St. Joseph, MN 56374	612-363-4596 612-252-5010
Patty Wetterling	29422 Kiwi Ct. St. Joseph, MN 56374	363-4479
Jim Kostraba Sheriff	Stearns County Sheriff's Dept. 830 LaSalle Pl. St. Cloud, MN 56301	259-3200

Name and TitleAddressTelephone #

St. Sen. Joe Bertram, Sr.	323 State Capitol St. Paul, MN 55155	296-2084
Sherri Gotchell	Rural Route 1 Granite Falls, MN 56241	