

THE WELLINGTON RADIO CLUB

**OFFERS AS A UNIQUE,
FREE PUBLIC SERVICE...**

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WRC ACTIVITIES CHAIRPERSON AT OUR WEBSITE:
WWW.QSL.NET/K4WRC**



LOST CHILD CENTERS AT LARGE EVENTS

*HELPING BRIDGE THE COMMUNICATIONS GAP BETWEEN
LAW ENFORCEMENT, PARENTS, THE PUBLIC AND EVENT ORGANIZERS*

AN IMMENSE PROBLEM

Junk mail arrives weekly that we hesitate to throw out. The ones with ads but also pictures of missing children. And, how often have you stopped to glance at the milk cartons in the local supermarket? You know, the ones with the missing kids on them. In addition to these periodic reminders, headlines draw our attention to this immense problem.

The *National Center for Missing and Exploited Children* states that about 2,000 children **each day** are reported missing to the FBI. That's a difficult figure to imagine.

A CHALLENGE AND OPPORTUNITY

The size of the missing child problem led us to think seriously about the role volunteer communicators can play to help in this tragic situation. We realized that the step *before* children are considered missing is often when they are *first* separated from their parents... they are often referred to as **lost**. As volunteers at many community events, we noticed that the management of the *lost* child situation was very different at each event and in some cases very casual.

Could we help prevent "*lost*" children from becoming "*missing*" by promptly concentrating our efforts on reuniting them with their parents? Could the trauma of both the child and par-

ent be reduced?

A SOLUTION: THE LOST CHILD CENTER...A SAFEHAVEN

Yes! One solution is to setup a booth or large vehicle with a very large, attention getting banner that can serve as a LOST CHILD AND COMMUNICATIONS CENTER. It provides the focal point for reuniting children with their parents and serves to bridge the communications gap between law enforcement, parents, the public and event organizers. By staffing a publicized and highly visible safehaven, we provide an invaluable, rewarding service:

- Parents see the banner and tell their kids to go there if separated,
- Passersby, police & security staff know where to bring lost children,
- Anxious parents know to go, or are directed, there when they realize their kids are missing,
- Immediate communications are maintained with event organizers and law enforcement, and
- Potential abductors may be thwarted by the higher risk, more child safe environment.

At larger events, additional small signs with arrows work to alert the parents and public to the existence and location of the Center. A by-product of the banner and signs is that security personnel and volunteers are reminded to be vigilant.



Above: The Lost Children & Communications Center at Wellington's 5th Anniversary Festivity... A successful event for the WRC. Two children were quickly reunited with their parents. A detailed account follows of that event to illustrate how we worked with Sheriff's Office and how the system functioned. **Middle:** The Bottom Line... Trauma relief, with child and parent together, also brings great volunteer satisfaction. **Right:** Volunteer posts signs to inform the attendees of the service and heighten the awareness of security personnel.

It is important to note that the need to immediately inform the primary public safety agency of a lost child situation does not change. Neither does the responsibility of event organizers for the safety of those attending.

What changes is that all concerned have additional resources available to make executing their responsibilities easier and more efficient.

THE BASICS

Prior to the event, and no later than the event setup, volunteer leaders must plan the placement of the Lost Child Center and select communications resources with event organizers and public safety personnel. Placement close to the Public Address system or a "hospitality" booth is recommended.

Coordination with law enforcement supervisors has always been very smooth. Private security firm supervisors often do not have specific plans for lost child situations. A simple plan must be developed, and understood by all concerned.

WRC volunteers are usually responsible for public address announcements, coordinating with the authorities, signs and caring for the lost child or working with the worried parent. Unfortunately, many law enforcement personnel have yet to receive specific training on the handling of *lost* children and in many jurisdictions there are no set procedures for doing so.

REDUCED TRAUMA AND GRIEF

Besides the techniques used to promptly reunite child with parent, specific training is useful in reducing child or parental trauma. For example, it is important to know *how* to assure them you understand their situation and concerns, they will be reunited, that they are safe, etc. In addition, we even have a small kit including teddy bears, crayons, coloring books, comic books, and games to occupy the child. We are careful to provide only water or club soda to the child with an unknown medical history.

A DETERRENT TO ABDUCTIONS

While the chances are statistically small, an abduction is everyone's nightmare. With the Lost Child and Communications booth prominently located, its banner high, signs out and alert communicators, most people feel an abductor would choose a less risky opportunity to execute his/her plan.

COMMUNITY & CHARITY EVENTS SERVED

Crowds estimated from 1,000 to 12,000

Literally dozens of LOST CHILDREN and parents have been reunited at these events...

WELLINGTON PUBLIC SAFETY DAY - 2004

NATIONAL HORSE SHOW-CHILDRENS FAIR - 11/03

4TH OF JULY-WELLINGTON - 2001 thru 2004

WALK TO CURE DIABETES - 2001 thru 2004

KIDS HEALTH DAY - PALMS WEST HOSPITAL - 5/02

WELLINGTON EGG HUNT - 4/02

WESTFEST - 11/01

5TH ANNIVERSARY WELLINGTON - 3/01

HOW TO PLEASE

Police assigned to community events are often stretched thin with vehicle and crowd control. The LOST CHILD CENTER makes their job easier and gains their appreciation of our communications skills. Not only does it greatly speed up the reunification process, reduce stress and anxiety but it also frees Police sooner to handle other public safety issues. No one doubts that many of these kids might not have seen their parents for hours had the communications resources, coordination and Lost Child Center not been available as a focal point.

WHY HAMS VOLUNTEER

The benefits to the community from the LOST CHILD CENTER service are pretty apparent. The radio amateur community likewise enjoys benefits from this type activity:

- **Everyone seeing the banner can't help but view the radio amateur in a positive image,**
- **Our preparedness for disasters and emergencies is heightened by coordinating and working with public safety agencies and ongoing training as a team,**
- **Our activities can draw media attention to the missing child dilemma and promote the Lost Child Center concept.**

But the major benefit is... We really feel great knowing we've quickly reunited a family and may have prevented the lost child from becoming a missing persons statistic!



WRC's LOST CHILDREN'S BOOTH - Westfest in Royal Palm Beach
Providing a safehaven for kids separated from their parents and more effective communications between parents, law enforcement and event organizers shows how a simple need can be satisfied by a caring club.



DIABETES WALK FOR THE CURE - West Palm Beach: *Often closing the "communications gap" means working closely with security firms in addition to law enforcement agencies. WRC Activities Chairman John, KG4JMO, coordinates with Wackenhut Capt. Willie Scott.*

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A TYPICAL LOST CHILD & COMMUNICATIONS OPERATION... WELLINGTON'S 5TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION

On Saturday, March 10, 2001 the Florida Highway Patrol Special Operations Van was the attention getting "Lost Child" and communications center. It carried its normal complement of police radios. By adding amateur radio equipment on loan from Wellington's Emergency Operations Center, EOC, it also supported the network of volunteers from the Wellington Radio Club, WRC. WRC members staff the EOC during emergencies and regularly serve at community events as part of their communications training. The radios were tested and the ham signals were crystal clear because of their very strong local repeater.

LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION!!!

The Van was positioned in a highly visible location just 200 feet from the event's main stage and the public address system.. It sported a very large banner to indicate its purpose to the estimated crowd of 8000 attendees. During the seven hour event, at least four radio amateurs, at any point in time, were at the Lost Child Center and circulating in the crowds wearing easy to spot yellow vests.

PUBLIC SAFETY & AMATEUR COMMUNICATIONS

About ten Palm Beach Sheriff's Office Deputies and one County EMS unit were assigned to the event... all using VHF radios. Because they did not have a common frequency with the equipment on-board the Van, one Deputy was issued an 800 MHz EOC radio with Mutual Aid Channels and appointed as a communications "Coordinator." That linked the Lost Child Center with all the public safety personnel at the event. The combined public safety and amateur radio "nets" was soon to be put to real use!



A very happy Taylor Walker throws her arms around her relieved mother, Shelley. Only 20 minutes earlier, Taylor could have single handedly ended our drought with her tears!

FIRST LOST CHILD OF THE DAY

An hour after installing the large LOST CHILDREN banner and again testing all systems, the first child was brought to

LOST CHILDREN & COMMUNICATIONS CENTER VOLUNTEERS

WELLINGTON RADIO CLUB MEMBERS

KC4VMO JOHN	KG4FKY JACK	KS4EC ROB
KF4GHM JOHN	KG4JMO JOHN	KS4NB LARRY
KF4TSQ LARRY	KR4WD GEORG	N0RBR FRED
WA4SBD LEOLA	WB4MOZ JOHN	

YOUTH AFFILIATES:

ALEISHA WESLEY, BART & SEBASTIAN PEASE

the Center. A passerby saw the child alone and crying hysterically. Remembering the banner, she knew where to take the child. The Deputies were notified on the Mutual Aid radio and the other ham volunteers alerted on two meters. The PA system announcement was made. The Radio Club was prepared with a kit of toys, crayons and games for lost children to use while waiting for their parents. When the mother realized her daughter was nowhere to be seen, she panicked; however, people nearby directed her to the LOST CHILD CENTER. After the child was calmed down, but even before the coloring kit could be given to her, her mother arrived. Whah-lah! Child and parent reunited within 20 minutes!

Before the EMS unit came on duty, another child was brought to the Center with a scraped knee. The mother applied a bandage and antiseptic from the First Aid kit.



Anxious child searches the crowd as WRC volunteer, Larry KS4NB, confers with PBSO Deputies Todd Chandler and Harold Eisenman. No more caring a team can be found on any force!

AND THEN THERE WERE TWO!

Deputies found the second lost child, a girl of about four, crying and wandering aimlessly in the crowd. Everyone was alerted by radio as she was brought to the Center. It was decided that the Deputies would work the crowd with the child looking for her parents while an announcement would be made over the event public address system. Only five minutes later, the Deputies encountered the mother approaching the Lost Child Center. Elapsed time... about 15 minutes!